Qualitative Living in a Quantitative World

# Chronicles of Culture

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# Qualitative Living in a Quantitative World

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## COMMENT

Recently a friend shocked his academic peers. He abjured his tenured security and left the academic sanctuary: after 15 years of university existence, he had had enough. He contended that the environment he initially sought—the community of scholars, the pipe and tweed—no longer existed. He charged that the university had internalized the grossest values of big business without their compensating virtues. While fostering a pretense of contemplation and scholarship, image and competitiveness were of the essence. The faculty concerned itself almost exclusively with research output—publish or perish—without inquiring about objective or efficacy. The academic security/reward system encouraged conformity in persons most vocal in praising nonconformity. University administrators awaited with bated breath the Carter Report to determine the number of "rated" departments. Academic "notables" were eagerly recruited—whether they were needed or not. Virtually all deferred to the mendacity of professional athletics, justifying it in terms of public relations. While projecting an image of teaching commitment and teaching excellence, few viewed students as anything but a necessary nuisance. My friend left this world for a small northwestern coastal village where he hoped to carve out a more authentic existence. He believes that he rejected a quantitative existence for a qualitative one.

Virtually every area of contemporary American life—education, politics, religion, business, environment, entertainment—is confronted by the conflict between the quantitative and the qualitative. How does one live a qualitative life in a quantitative world? How does the individual maintain his personal integrity in the computer-automation world?

Education represents a vital battlefield in the qualitative-quantitative struggle. The elementary and secondary educational establishments seem primarily concerned—in addition to job security—with shuffling a maximal number of bodies during a minimal length of time. Social promotion prevents the embarrassment of failure. Achievement, challenge, and inspiration are all secondary. The American approach to education seems to imply impressive enrollment figures coupled with unimpressive accomplishment. Few were surprised by the ramifications cited by the report of the National Commission on Excellence in Education. Quantity reigns over quality as we become less and less able to compete on the international scene. It is no wonder that thousands are rejecting the public school system for the expense and challenge of a private education. Perhaps a well-funded alternative to public education would provide the catalyst necessary for revitalization.

Few areas have capitulated so totally to the quantitative as that of politics. In political campaigns, top priority is accorded to hiring the computer jockeys, the pollsters, the PR experts—most of whom are quite flexible and will often go to the highest bidder. They will arrange the candidate's image and explain what will "play in Peoria." They will locate the available votes and devise the formula necessary to conjure them up. Hence the sameness and blandness found in contemporary American politicians. Hence, too, the decline in the caliber of persons willing to seek public office. The vulgarity of American politics is endurable only in view of its more-vulgar alternatives.

The academic study of politics—political science—reflects the same obsession with the quantitative. Disproportionate resources are channeled into the study of that which is most amenable to quantification—voting behavior. The great questions related to justice, the good life, the ideal society must fend for themselves since they are not easily quantified. Political philosophy, with its concern for the wisdom of the great thinkers, is merely tolerated—primarily for antiquarian reasons. The emphasis is on the study of political (*read:* voting) behavior. It goes unmentioned that, historically, voting is of fairly recent vintage and that comparatively few polities even today have meaningful elections. Even in a society such as the U.S. the sophisticated recognize the limited impact of the electoral process and the expanded power of the bureaucracy and judiciary. Did the 1972 Nixon landslide affect elitist decisions relating to affirmative action, busing, and abortion? Critics of behavioral emphasis cite with glee the last statement of the 1980 pollsters concerning the Reagan-Carter race that it was too close to call. Similarly they cite the exit poll in the recent Chicago mayoral election indicating that only four percent of the voters were influenced by race. Still the political science profession genuflects to the tyranny of numbers in its perennial search for ironclad laws of politics.

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American religion, too, has succumbed to the numbers game. The most popular and "successful" denominations are those most impressed by quantification. They exclaim from the church tops their impressive figures on attendance, conversion, and building construction. Dial a prayer and be counted for Jesus! The Saturday religious pages of most newspapers are often, at best, tasteless. Ironically, a society unrivaled in numerical church attendance and involvement has failed in the qualitative sphere. Despite the impressive numbers and resources, it has failed to produce a Cardinal Newman, a Pascal, a Kierkegaard. Where are its Bachs and Palestrinas? Where are its saints, mystics, and scholars? Where is its spiritually inspired architecture? It has failed to produce a "high" culture motivated by Christian spirituality. Religion has become primarily a social phenomenon—good for the children and business, tolerated and indeed encouraged because its benefits are measurable. Should our political and economic structures collapse and our people taste adversity, it is doubtful whether our churches would be able to sustain our cultural heritage, as once occurred in Ireland and Greece, and is currently occurring in Poland.

The American business world seems characterized by bigness, uniformity, and conformity, leaving little room for tradition, charm, or character. Appeals to the common denominator —give the people what they want; will it sell—are the major concerns. There seems to be little pride in good workmanship or service. Gone are the old grocery and drugstores that served multiple purposes and were neighborhood assets. Gone, too, are the traditional bookstores that encouraged conversation and browsing. In virtually every area, the supermarket mentality dominates and caters only to speed and convenience. Quantity prevails over quality.

Our man-made environment also reflects our hierarchy of values. Sadly, little of our architectural past survives the bulldozer. Edmund Burke perceptively commented that those who lose the sense of continuity will be akin to the flies of the summer. But in today's world much of the structural beauty is ravished in favor of utilitarian considerations. The result is a lack of roots, tradition, and continuity in our world of numbers. Each generation seems destined to rebuild our cities and then bemoan what was sacrificed. We move like flights of bees from area to area, dwelling to dwelling, job to job—always seeking new opportunities and securities. Upon return to our traditional terrain we are shocked to find little that is recognizable.

The less said about mass popular entertainment the better. The unending TV gladiatorial exhibitions labeled athletics, the situation comedies and money shows with their piped-in applause and laughter, radio with its barrage of noise and advertisement—these entertain the nation. Survey research prescribes what is marketable, while the producers are well aware which sectors can be ridiculed—e.g., WASP's, the South, Evangelicals—and which are sacrosanct. Ultimately all must bow to the powerful rating system that dictates survival or oblivion. Supposedly, the people get what they want.

American "high" culture presents an ambivalent picture. In terms of numbers, resources, and dynamism there is notable accomplishment. Considering our population and geographic size there is impressive symphonic, opera, and ballet activity. But, as with religion, one might inquire about motivation and quality. How creative are we? Have we moved significantly beyond the imitational? How many of our works are worthy of export? Where is the operatic and symphonic music that has attracted an international audience? When will one see American operas performed at Covent Garden and La Scala? Are we but a European dependency in the realm of "high" culture—impressive in numbers, less impressive in quality and impact?

As we move into the computer-automation age, the demands of quantification will become even more insistent. The technology necessary for mass quantification moves ahead. As never before, each person will be accorded numbered status and little will escape the realm of numbers. How might one resist and preserve some personal integrity? Dissent, as with my academic friend, is possible, but difficult, and open only to those willing to bear the consequences. Prerequisites are (1) nerve and a willingness to take a chance; (2) strong conviction of one's inner values; (3) lack of concern for the opinions of others about success/failure; and (4) a willingness to accept a lower standard of living. Those who will dissent are the salt of the earth and the hope for some future revitalization that will restore quantity and quality to their respective places in the hierarchy of values. For crude, vulgar, and uniform as our democratic-utilitarian polity might be, still the hope of change and sense of the alternatives prevents despair.

*—Daniel J. O'Neil*

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### *History of Literature in America*

*Parade*, an ultraliberal Sunday "magazine," to which the highest standards of intellectuality are represented by the likes of Messrs. Jack Anderson, Tad Szulc, or David Halberstam, responds to a reader's inquiry: "How does the world of literature rate Robert Lowell? . . ."

A. Robert Lowell (1917-77), a Boston Brahmin and the winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, was surely one of the outstanding American poets of his time. Unfortunately, he was manic-depressive with a supine father and a dominating mother. Much of his adult life was spent in and out of sanitariums. He had three wives: the novelist Jean Stafford, whose nose he twice broke; the essayist Elizabeth Hardwick, to whom he invariably returned after bouts with his mistresses; and Lady Caroline Blackwood, an Anglo-Irish heiress. For further details of his tormented life, read 'Robert Lowell,' by Ian Hamilton, an excellent biography. □



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# The X-Rated Weapon

**Sam Cohen: *The Truth About the Neutron Bomb: The Inventor of the Bomb Speaks Out;* William Morrow; New York.**

**by Will Morrisey**

"This book marks the first time a 'nuclear hawk' has defected from the American nuclear establishment," exclaims the dust jacket. One expects another "What have I done?" lament, guaranteed to make its author a celebrity on the church and college lecture circuit. Partisans of disarmament will surely buy it, hoping to confirm their prejudices. If so, I hope they read it. For Sam Cohen (who worked at Los Alamos during World War II, then became a specialist in radiological warfare, inventing the neutron warhead during the late 1950's) refuses to see himself as a Dr. Frankenstein:

> Speaking candidly and truthfully, I will say that I've never had any moral qualms or feelings of guilt about my pursuits in this military field. I have always believed that the United States must have strong and effective military forces—especially nuclear forces.

His patience with dovish colleagues is limited: "many respected scientists . . . know better intellectually but are emotionally helpless to look objectively at issues involving the military use of nuclear radiation." Or, still more bluntly,

> [T]here has been one thing that particularly impressed—better still, depressed—me about most renowned American scientists. This is their ability to be impeccably careful and responsible when working in their fields of specialization (if they're not, their colleagues will catch them and even punish them) but their sloppiness and irresponsibility when giving their scientific opinion on nuclear weapons when they have an ideological bias against them, because they know that their colleagues, who share their bias, don't give a damn when they do.

Among these are scientists prominent in the nuclear-freeze campaign: the late Dr. George Kistiakowsky, Eisenhower's science adviser, whose "strong ideological conviction that a nuclear test ban was imperative" led him to support the first such ban (1958), abrogated by the Soviets three years later; Dr. Jerome Weisner of MIT, who campaigned vigorously for John Kennedy and evidently has maintained his partisan allegiance; and Nobelist Hans Bethe, who claimed, with Oppenheimer, that the hydrogen bomb could not be built. Cohen dispels the popular illusion that scientists speak objectively when they engage in politics.

Cohen divides his book into two sections. The first four chapters contain his account of the neutron warhead's invention and the controversies it provoked. The Pentagon had wanted nuclear warheads that could generate a powerful blast, intense heat, and radiation—in that order. Cohen wanted to reverse that priority, for two purposes: to develop a warhead whose high radioactivity would cause the explosive in an incoming nuclear warhead to decompose (e.g., the Sprint anti-ICBM missile which resulted "many years later"); to develop a short-range missile warhead whose intense but short-lived radiation would make it "the first battlefield weapon . . . in history [that] would allow a guaranteed, highly effective defense against an invading army without producing wholesale physical destruction of the country being invaded."

The Pentagon, particularly the Navy, championed the neutron warhead from 1959 to 1961, not so much because it cared about the weapon itself but because it wanted to end the Eisenhower/Khrushchev nuclear test ban. Then as today, the Soviets denounced neutron technology, with Khrushchev averring, "This is the morality of monsters!" Similar protestations from the community of conscience recurred until September 1, 1961, when the Politburo announced a unilateral end to the ban, followed by "the most massive series of tests the world has ever seen." Having arranged their experiments in advance, the Soviets briefly gained a lead in nuclear-weapons technology. (Cohen has the good manners not to insist that readers associate this tactic with Mr. Andropov's recommended "freeze.") After this debacle, the Pentagon no longer needed the neutron warhead as a weapon in bureaucratic warfare; interest in it disappeared until the mid-1970's. By then, the policy of détente had yielded a Soviet advantage in European ground troops so striking that even President Jimmy Carter noticed it. He planned the neutron warhead's production and deployment, then reneged after Brezhnev, Senator Mark O. Hatfield, and other peace-loving souls inveighed against the "capitalist bomb" that "destroys people but not property." Cohen remarks:

> The problem is that any agreement, tacit or explicit, to effect a mutual forswearing of N-bomb production is nonsense. There is no conceivable

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way, by means of national technical verification, that such an agreement can be monitored.

Seismic sensors can detect the underground testing of warheads that explode by nuclear fission; they cannot detect the much smaller explosions produced by nuclear fusion in neutron warheads. Once again, this has obvious implications for any nuclear-arms treaty.

President Reagan ordered the production of neutron warheads, but deferred their deployment in Europe until land-based intermediate-range missiles (Pershing II's and ground-launched cruise missiles) are in place. Impatient with international diplomacy, Cohen argues that a weapon good enough to produce is good enough to deploy.

The book's last five chapters consist of polemics on the military, ethical, and political problems associated with Cohen's invention. He quickly disposes of opponents regarded as experts by the news media. To Herbert Scoville, Jr., one of the most-quoted freeze personalities who claims that irradiated soldiers will fight harder, Cohen asserts that the soldiers targeted will quickly become incapacitated, that by asking us to fear the possible behavior of soldiers on the periphery of the explosion Scoville "divert[s] the targeting issue to troops that aren't targeted." To Dr. Kistiakowsky, who claimed that the Soviets could shield their tank crews against radiation, Cohen agrees that indeed one can, "provided that you're willing to incapacitate the tank" by overloading it with heavy armor. To Stanford physicist Sidney Drell, who claims that a neutron warhead explosion would make the irradiated area "uninhabitable for long periods of time," Cohen replies that "This is patently false," that calculations show radiation declining to a safe level in a few hours. To United States Senator H. John Heinz, who claims that the neutron warhead is "literally dehumanizing," Cohen responds that "Speaking for myself, if I were going to be wounded on the field of battle, I'd far rather be dosed by radiation than burned by napalm, or crushed by blast concussion, or have my body torn up by a land mine or a fragmentation bomb."

These arguments are not just persuasive, they are simple. Orwell argued that intellectuals think badly about war because they imagine suffering so vividly that their fear overturns their intellect. I am convinced that there is another problem: even when intellectuals master their fear, the basic simplicity of warfare befuddles them. It is too unsubtle for them to grasp, all this business of push coming to shove. They complicate the issues beyond recognition, then take professional soldiers for bloody-minded dolts. Cohen, no professional soldier, is at his best when he thinks like one.

But at his worst, Cohen essays geopolitical strategy. His advertised defection from "the American nuclear establishment" consists merely of an argument for isolationism. In a war with the Soviets, he believes, Europe and the Middle East would cost us more to defend than they are worth. Thus he suggests we pull our troops out and use the money saved to rebuild our nuclear arsenal and strengthen our civil defense. These sentiments are hardly a serious policy for a commercial republic confronting totalitarianism. Soviet domination of Europe and the Middle East would, of course, give them control of two of our principal markets. Even in its military aspect, Cohen's isolationism fails. He calls defending Europe impossible because the Soviets will try to destroy NATO's nuclear defenses, including neutron warheads, before they march. But the Soviets have warned that any NATO warheads hitting Soviet territory—and some surely would—will bring retaliation against the United States itself. If they mean that, they recognize that a European war would probably cause global war. They will not imagine they can win that war unless Western pacifists have their way. Nuclear weapons in Western Europe will tie America to its allies more firmly than at any time in 20 years. Europeans who fear this tie, who feel more threatened by our weapons and our policy than by Soviet weapons and policy, may yet decide to see more clearly. Cohen says they won't, a dubious assertion. One thing seems evident: it would be a bad mistake to insure defeat by giving up too soon. □

## In the Mail

***Under Scorpio* by Thomas G. Bergin; Solaris Press; Rochester, MI.** Poems written as poems were once written—before greeting cards and newspaper squibs became the standards.

***The Games They Played: Sports in American History, 1865-1980* by Douglas A. Noverr and Lawrence E. Ziewacz; Nelson-Hall; Chicago.** Not only can this book be used to win bar bets, but it's also interesting, as lists of statistics aren't.

***A Late Friendship: The Letters of Karl Barth and Carl Zuckmayer* translated by Geoffrey W. Bromiley; Wm. B. Eerdmans; Grand Rapids, MI.** One fears what will happen if the Bell System's campaign promoting the use of telephones as a way of keeping in touch succeeds, particularly in light of these delicate missives.

***Publius: Annual Review of American Federalism: 1981* edited by Stephen L. Schecter; University Press of America/Center for the Study of Federalism; Washington, DC.** A study of the effects of the sometimes-bitter medicine: the Reagan Administration's "New Federalism" and the states.

***Carter Braxton, Virginia Signer: A Conservative in Revolt* by Alonzo Thomas Dill; University Press of America; Washington, DC.** Not well known, but nonetheless interesting: he was accused of being a pirate; he wasn't certain about cutting the ties with Great Britain; he ultimately signed the Declaration of Independence.



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# Foppish Fiction

**Ed McClanahan: *The Natural Man;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.**

**Todd McEwen: *Fisher's Hornpipe;* Harper & Row; New York.**

**Kelly Cherry: *In the Wink of an Eye;* Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.**

**by Robert F. Geary**

What is wrong with contemporary fiction? A reading of this trio of comic novels brings to mind a couple of the many diagnoses. Some years back Lionel Trilling warned that political abstractions could cut the imagination off from the rich complexities of life—from a vision of the mixed nature of human motivation and the often ironical, even tragic, nature of consequences. More recently, a portion of blame has fallen upon the "creative writing" industry, from college courses to writers' workshops wherein successful names inculcate the familiar subjects, attitudes, and recipes to worshipful apprentices. As a result, the smug outlook on the world prevalent in academia can come to generate fiction that is increasingly imitative, infatuated with technique for its own sake, and marked by a narrow, thin range of characters and pseudoinsights. Such fiction might find itself well received by the self-consciously literary portion of the reading public, many of whom appear to be withdrawing ever further into a dream world where, for instance, wishing loudly for "peace" will make peace a reality.

Certainly something (though not everything) is wrong with current fiction, at least if we can judge from the evidence of these three slender novels, each of which bids for a few hours of a reader's time and, with prices between 11 and 16 dollars, more than a little of his money. One book is a successful comedy, another an engaging but mixed effort, a third worthless. On balance, though, one can see why many less sophisticated readers look to the paperback racks for amusement if not edification: none of these works manages to engage contemporary reality in a genuinely convincing fashion—and two of them decidedly try.

Ed McClanahan's *The Natural Man* is by far the best of the group. Perhaps by setting the novel sufficiently far in the past—in tiny Needmore, Kentucky, after World War II—McClanahan can escape doctrinaire poses and capture a richness about people and place in a genuinely funny book about the half year in the life of Harry Eastep when, turning 16, he achieved manhood, though not in the way he expected. In finely turned, lucid, and economical prose, McClanahan deals lightly but keenly with adolescence, the need for roots, the importance of continuity, and, lastly, the meaning of adulthood. For a first novel, *The Natural Man* has a sureness about its prose and characterization that lets the author gracefully reveal surprising depths in the most comical of characters without ever violating their fictional consistency or the book's tone. The reader, like young Harry Eastep, ends the summer's string of raucous teenage pranks quietly astonished to find that an unexpected wisdom has come to him amid the high jinks.

The agent of Harry's coming of age is the formidable "Monk" McHorning who arrives in sleepy Needmore one summer afternoon possessed only of a battered suitcase, a worse reputation, and extensive endowments of brute strength and low cunning. An "orphant boy," as the locals say, McHorning has been adopted by the high school basketball coach for the simple, venal purpose of ending the Burdock County Bulldogs' years of defeats by every team except a school for the deaf. Six-five and pathologically ferocious, McHorning seems the "natural man" to change all that. And with his Camels, condoms, and endless ribald jokes, he appears equally suited to guide young Harry out of unwanted virginity and, in time, out of hickish Needmore (the limitations of which Harry's early years in comparatively cosmopolitan Dayton, Ohio, have made clear). Inspired by lust and McHorning, Harry plans the seduction of the daughter of the owner of the movie house where he works. Events seem to fall in with his designs when one Philander C. Rexroat, Doctor of Sexuality (a man before his time!) books the theater for a one-night crusade on behalf, allegedly, of sexual hygiene. Harry, with his newly acquired driver's permit, discerns his chance to take advantage of the presumably aroused hefty young woman and slip away with her during the second showing of the doctor's "educational" film.

The night of the gin-besotted Doctor's pathetic and hilarious presentation, Harry does indeed become a man. But suddenly we find ourselves asking what it means, after all, to become a man, to be an adult. What, really, is a natural man? "Art is man's nature," said Edmund Burke two centuries ago in rebuke of the levelers, constitution-mongers, and pseudoprimitives who would destroy the civilizing processes in quest of an illusory paradise of social and instinctual democracy. McClanahan's novel, in its own way, embodies this insight. Monk McHorning's glandular prowess is and is not what it means to be a natural man. Human nature is physical and instinctual in part (and the book enjoys that dimension). But it is also more. To establish continuities with the past (in the form of bonds with one's elders), to learn to love a particular place and people (the "little platoon" of which Burke spoke) as Harry learns to love Needmore, and to develop and live by a code of decency—these also are natural, not in the sense that they are instinctual givens but in the sense that to strive for

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them is as much as anything else what it means to be human. Harry learns this experientially as he finds unsuspected depths in the people who surround him. It is the achievement of *The Natural Man* to convey so much sense amid so much delicious fun.

An air of nostalgia, though not of a cheaply sentimental sort, pervades McClanahan's novel. The world of Needmore, the author knows, is gone; even in the summer of the book's action, television—carrier of a blander, more uniform, middle-class, national culture—already has begun to exert its lure on the locals. A hapless charlatan like Dr. Rexroat, who cannot fool even the inhabitants of this backwater, takes on an endearing charm partly by virtue of the unspoken but inevitable contrast with his far more slick and dangerous counterparts today. McHorning, we know from the start, would meet his death in our more violent and chaotic times—"fragged" by his own men in our war in Vietnam. The nostalgic air raises in the reader's mind a question: can the kind of rich comic imagination we find here engage the contemporary reality with equal balance and success? Or is the American urban scene of the last decade so ridden with ideological fanaticisms as to thwart the sense of artistic perspective, combining detachment and love, vital to a rich comedy? The evidence of the two other comic attempts does not suggest an encouraging answer. It would seem that, as we move from past to present and from country to city, the winds of ideological fashion loosen the grasp of fiction on the realities of genuine experience, leaving us with giddy, zany, increasingly weightless books.

The much-touted "New Boston" is the setting for another first novel, Todd McEwen's *Fisher's Hornpipe*. Indeed, it is, in a sense, the antagonist, for the people peculiar to the renewed downtown and environs are the people with whom the title character wrestles madly, hilariously, but finally inconclusively. McEwen wittily delineates the mixture of largely "New Class" types that give the Cambridge-Back Bay-Faneuil Hall axis the distinctive ethos which makes the area a magnet for the likes of the novel's SUNY-Buffalo drop-out now artfully social climbing among the media execs of Harvard Square. McEwen catches an array of such trendy folks: the boozy Brahmin playboy who invites Fisher for libations at "Quincy Mawket"; the vegetarian survivor of the counterculture's heyday who keeps a cozy little suburban commune Fisher dubs "the Fruitlands"; and the feminist law student on her way to becoming Fisher's ex-girl friend with this profound missive affixed one morning to the fridge: "You can't treat me like this anymore. Don't you realize I'm in Law School? We have to talk. You've changed . . . [etc.]." Not of this class is the itinerant alcoholic "philosopher" who inveigles Fisher into typing and later promulgating a bizarre manifesto denouncing the general state of things in America. Fisher, through whose consciousness the book is narrated, depicts with zesty anger the cultural rituals and shrines of the New Class —the obligatory French film showing at an arty little theater in Harvard Square, the fern-filled salad restaurants nearby, and, of course, the sacramental health food of Fruitlands: "a flavorless rubbery ball which stuck limpetlike to the roof of his [Fisher's] mouth and seemed to be slowly expanding." Through all this stumbles the bumbling Fisher, somewhat unhinged, it seems, from a fall on the ice of Walden Pond that has left him with a grotesque bandage and an enraged disposition.

Yet for all its acute and amusing ob-


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## Liberal Culture

### *Gigolo Justice*

Since 1976 when the California Supreme Court established the community-property rights of couples who live together with a nonmarital "contract," the financial security of mistresses has been bountifully assured. Now, in the name of evenhandedness, California's generous judicial system has extended the same gracious retirement benefits to their male counterparts. Recently a Santa Monica court awarded $125,000 to British actor Trevor Hook for services rendered to Esther Trynin while living with her, sans ceremony, for 17 years until her death in 1981. No evidence existed to indicate that Ms. Trynin desired such a settlement, except for Mr. Hook's claim that she named him in a will which she somehow never got around to signing. Nonetheless, a spokeswoman for his attorney was jubilant about the ruling: "To the best of my knowledge, this is the first case in California or anywhere else in which palimony benefits have been granted to a man," she declared.

We agree. However, the practice itself is as old as the Ionic capital. What's new is that in California a male of that profession is considered a man. □

servations of the places, customs, and people of the New Class, *Fisher's Hornpipe* lacks a certain solidity at its center. The trouble begins with the title character, about whom we learn not enough. Where he comes from or what he believes are never conveyed, in spite of the fact that the narration is filtered through his consciousness. Throughout he remains vague. An occasional outburst against TV or commercialism does not constitute a vision or a value system. Unlike the other characters, Fisher seems created not from reality but from a mix of literary abstractions (perhaps he is to be taken as a modern urban Thoreau) and uncertain authorial projection. He never attains the curious depth of an even more outrageous misfit with whom he invites comparison, Ignatius J. Reilly of J. K. Toole's *A Confederacy of Dunces,* whose misanthropy is a sincere, though grotesquely comic, revulsion at contemporary cultural chaos, a revulsion based on a vision of an ordered past, however idealized and unattainable. In contrast, Fisher's anger—and consequently the book's satire—is simply dyspeptic; lacking focus and real bite, it seems caused as much as anything else by that blow to his head on Walden Pond. Without such an animating center of vision, *Fisher's Hornpipe* adds up to less than the sum of its parts. Fisher, at the close, emerges as a purely passive figure stuck in a kind of suspended animation as he kicks sand aimlessly on the seashore. He has resolved nothing, accepted nothing, rejected nothing. In a melancholy muddle, the novel simply stops.

The book's problem appears not to stem from any lack of technical skill or comic sense: *Fisher's Hornpipe* is both literate and, at times, very funny. Rather, one suspects that McEwen has no allegiance to anything but the New Class whose foibles he mocks. Hence he must back away from the conflicts of contemporary urban America which his book raises. Indeed, McEwen seems barely aware of any portions of the city, let alone any classes of people or values these people and neighborhoods might still hold, other than the chic downtown and Harvard Square areas in which his trendy characters (and comic targets) move. Yet other people and values do exist. To take but one example: the author might easily have observed and followed up on an old man with a sign who has for years stood in the sharpest contrast to the fashionable locale of the novel and its new-age atmosphere. Though shabbily dressed, he is no bum; his message, "abortion is killing," is, though anathema, no farrago of obscure protests. A pariah amid the lunch crowds and shoppers patronizing the Market's classy spas and boutiques, he—not the rootless and vague alcoholic "philosopher"—rightly symbolizes the older values denied by the Market's tasteful hedonism.

But this sort of conflict McEwen cannot or will not engage. Thus the comic apocalypse in which the bums sack the quiche-and-salad restaurants and the like emporia of New Class elegance has, finally, no real significance; for all the book's seeming anger, it is but the counterpart of a pillow fight, dissipating what had given signs of a powerful satiric attack. Although, and partly because, *Fisher's Hornpipe* is an amusing and promising book, the weightlessness at its core—manifest in the title character and the main external action—disappoints. After the laughter we have not the meat Fisher so longs for in the salad bars of Harvard Square but something closer to a comic quiche.

To say that the comic fantasy of Kelly Cherry's *In the Wink of an Eye* utterly mismatches the book's subject (South American revolution) and its maudlin dedication to "Oppressed Peoples Everywhere" is to capture only a portion of what is wrong with this modish, brainless effusion. Lacking even the excuse of being a first novel, the work's style and outlook do, in a way, cohere perfectly to express the mentality of an updated "radical chic." Thus the comic fantasy



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actually fits neatly a politics of self-indulgent fantasy in which even revolution (or, more precisely, revolutionary attitudinizing) forms but another mark of one's supposedly superior sensibility. *In the Wink of an Eye* presupposes the mind-set, so common in academia, that just *knows* that the United States is corrupt, that leftist terrorists are fundamentally on the side of right, and similar axioms of the higher political sagacity. Readers beguiled by such visions of the world may find the book amusing rather than inane. Others, who expect politics and political fiction (however comic) to have some grounding in reality, are likely to find the novel pointless and unfunny throughout.

Revolution is the ostensible subject of this novel in which copious citations from Ché Guevara are the author's idea of how to endow cardboard figures with some of the solidity decent fiction requires. In a plot filled with bizarre, hectic twists, amiable Bolivian radicals use their profits from robbing—or "liberating"—banks first to buy a small section of their country, then (profiting hugely from petroleum deposits) to annex Bolivia and, in time, South America. In a reversal of the "Good Neighbor Policy," they even bail the United States out of impending financial catastrophe. All goes splendidly until the real establishment, the power behind all thrones (even behind the Kremlin!)—the Mafia—cracks down. The noble little band then must find a new paradise, one literally and appropriately out of this world. The whole work has the zany turns of Vonnegut's comic-book novels, but it lacks even the imaginative energy infusing some of his better situations.

Real revolution is not the true subject of this exercise in armchair radical posturing. Revolutionary politics is clearly secondary to private sexual fulfillment. Two characters in particular illustrate that for Kelly Cherry radical politics is but theater of the self. One—18, "pro art and little else"—discovers her cause: "playing, in real life, Joan of Arc . . . a modern version," she will lead a general strike against everything. At this the author smiles indulgently, inviting readers to accept the character not as a potentially dangerous airhead but as a charming waif. The girl is "[n]aturally . . . anti-inflation, anti-Thatcher, anti-Nuke, and anti-American," so her heart is in the right place. Naturally. Most admirable of all is the ultra-autonomous character who smokes cigars and sculpts in metal from her loft in the Bowery. Since radicalism is but a pose, the outcome of the revolution is unimportant; each member of the little band acquires an appropriate sexual partner, and we have the perfect "happy ending" to a consummate novel for the decade of self-fulfillment where the only true comedy lies in unintentional self-satire.

Much can be learned from the endings of these three books. McClanahan's *The Natural Man* closes on a note of continuity, a legacy from Monk McHorning which knits together past, present, and future. *Fisher's Hornpipe* dwindles to a stop as the title character and his creator do not know where to turn from the shallowness they perceive. *In the Wink of an Eye* ends with the pseudo-revolutionaries heading into space—like the book, totally weightless in a self-made little world cut loose from earth's reality. One could hardly ask for a better symbol than this—all the more perfect for being unwitting—of the smug moral solipsism infecting many of America's "intellectuals." (Unsurprisingly, Kelly Cherry is "Permanent Writer-in-Residence" at a big-name university.) No wonder, then, "serious" fiction seems divorced from much of life or must turn to the past and a provincial setting to escape the enervating force of the abstractions and doctrinaire poses that blunt *Fisher's Hornpipe* and make *In the Wink of an Eye* a parody of itself.

There is, perhaps, a remedy for this sort of coterie fiction—skilled but imitative, hothouse, and academic. It begins with Dr. Johnson's sturdy advice: "Clear your mind of cant." □

# Of Jewish Humans & Italian Humanoids

**Alberto Moravia: *1934;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.**

**Aharon Appelfeld: *Tzili;* E. P. Dutton; New York.**

**by Bryce Christensen**

Charles Darwin wrote no novels, though he wrote a great deal of fiction, none of it good. In *The Descent of Man* he argued not only for the scientific principle of natural selection, but for an imaginative vision defining man's place in the world as simply that of an animal. Believing that he had discovered among the simpler creatures analogs for all of man's most complex intellectual, emotional, religious, and moral activities, Darwin asserted that no absolute metaphysical, ontological, or spiritual gulf separated a man from a dog, an insect, or—for that matter—from inanimate matter. As one of his critics put it, his was the Medusa myth in reverse: he turned stones into men. This was, of course, not science, as the codiscoverer of natural selection, Alfred Wallace, pointed out, but merely speculative philosophizing—implausible, unsatisfying philosophizing at that, in Wallace's view. The human mind and spirit, Wallace maintained, are utterly unique and cannot be explained by any strictly naturalistic evolutionary schemata. Unfortunately, cultural forces more powerful than Wallace prevailed: Darwin's fiction triumphed as dogma,

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while Wallace and his views were quietly interred in scholarly footnotes.

The consequences have been awful. Bestial and inhuman acts gained a quasi-scientific justification, as "survival of the fittest" became the excuse for the most rapacious and predatory behavior. Ignored was the fact that our very use of the word *inhuman* and the total absence of analogs *(incanine? insimian? infeline?)* testifies to man's distinctively moral character. Nazism, in particular, with its cant about inferior races, its eugenic experimentation, and its extermination camps, seemed terribly logical to post-Darwinian men convinced that they were truly animals (albeit superior ones) and that therefore amoral and brutish behavior toward other men was not only natural but even imperative.

"*1934* is very much a romantic work."

—*Harper's*

The horrors of fascism, of course, are a favorite theme among 20th-century novelists. Virtually all of them oppose the specific actions of Hitler, Mussolini, and their partisans, but the imaginative force of their opposition depends ultimately upon their vision of man. If they follow Darwin, as does Alberto Moravia, in seeing man as essentially an animal, then their artistic repudiation of nazism must remain weak and uncompelling, no matter what talent or ingenuity they bring to their work. Moravia, to be sure, is a writer of ability and his attempt in *1934* to discredit German and Italian fascism shows marks of craftsmanship. But a portrait of Darwin hangs in the Caprisean pensione where the action is centered, and his pervasive influence undermines the protagonist's (and author's) stand against the führer and Il Duce.

Early in the novel, the protagonist, a young Italian writer named Lucio, concedes his almost complete surrender to Darwinism by explaining that "we are not completely human; or rather, we are human only to a minimum degree, let's say two percent; for the other ninety-eight percent we are animals." In a different novel this might be an acceptable hyperbole expressing the genuine difficulty of mastering the powerful subliminal impulses constantly tempting us to forsake our humanity. However, in *1934* no one *wants* to be human. Lucio is convinced that if he allows his "two percent of humanity" to prevail, he must inevitably kill himself, since he is "absolutely certain that the normal condition of man should be despair" and that the logic of despair leads to self-destruction. Not really wanting to do this, he seeks to "stabilize despair" by bringing it into "an unshakable balance" with his animal appetites. In his search for such stability, he falls in lust with a German actress with a split personality. Half of this woman is sheer animal: energetic, voracious, libidinous, and nazi. The other half, the half that most attracts Lucio, is "human," that is, utterly despairing. Hopeless and literary, she invites Lucio to join her in adultery and then, a la Kleist, double suicide.

Thus humanness is reduced to a death wish, a compulsion found among lemmings, while all vitality is ascribed to animality—and to fascism. Lucio is naturally opposed to fascism, but its ascendance, he himself tells us, has nothing to do with his "metaphysical" despair: "I would have felt just as despairing if Fascism were to fall," he admits. Moreover, Lucio is not opposed to fascism because it is bestial—since he himself is trying to cultivate enough carnality to survive. He is even repeatedly willing to feign allegiance to the brown shirts in order to get his genital target closer to his bed. What apparently bothers him about fascism is that it seeks to organize animality: lone wolves are acceptable; organized packs are not.

It is order, then, and not fascism that Lucio and his creator actually abhor. Moravia even posits a linkage between conventional sexuality and fascism on the one hand and on the other perversion and antinazism. In the end, this means that the German actress (both halves) commits suicide with her lesbian lover after the Night of the Long Knives, leaving Lucio drearily balancing his human despair and his animal libido.

But who cares? If Moravia wishes, as the dustcover claims, to explore the nature of "politics and love" during a "terrible time," why has he focused his overly contrived and implausibly artificial plot on featherless bipeds who, having no affirmative sense of their humanity, want to blot themselves out of the realm of all politics, love, and time just as soon as sex has grown cloying? The novel includes several negative references to nazi anti-Semitism, but what tenable arguments or moving sentiments can suicide-prone anthropoids marshal against Auschwitz? If the desire to live is nothing but an animal drive, why should we consider the perpetrators of the Holocaust any more culpable than Swift and Armour's butchers in the Chicago stockyards? Conversely, if humanness means nothing but despondency, then humans everywhere should have flocked to the gas chambers and thanked the nazis for providing such a modern convenience.

Those destroyed at Auschwitz and Buchenwald did not eagerly rush to their deaths. However, because they



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knew (as many no-nuke partisans now do not) that temporal existence is not the supreme human good and that therefore death is not the worst evil, many accepted their cruel fate with dignified resignation. But none expressed gratitude to those who labeled, treated, and slaughtered them as animals. They wanted to live, and for distinctively human reasons. Hints as to the character of this affirmative humanness are simply but engagingly suggested in *Tzili* by Aharon Appelfeld, an Israeli who escaped as a boy from a nazi concentration camp in Ukraina. *Tzili* is the story of a rather unintelligent, unattractive Jewish girl who survives the war years in eastern Europe by denying her Jewish identity explicitly and by denying her humanity implicitly, adopting a near-bovine existence as she wanders the countryside, working winters for poor and disreputable peasants. But through reflection upon life with her murdered family and even more through experiences with Jews who either escape or survive the camps, Tzili slowly grows into a consciousness of the positive meaning of her human identity. As she hears other Jews repeatedly aver, "Man is not an insect," "Woman is not an insect," Tzili likewise learns in a climactic moment of self-discovery: "I am not an animal. I am a woman." This is hardly a subtle insight, but in the age of Darwin it bears artistic restatement.

Of course Jews, like everyone else, are subject to animal cravings, irrational fears, crazed longings, and, too, despair. Indeed, despair hovers in Appelfeld's novella like a suffocating cloud, threatening to extinguish the very flame of life. But unlike Moravia's languid nihilists who identify despair as the acme of their humanness—a peak from which to throw themselves—Appelfeld's characters perceive that despair and self-destruction derive from the loss of our unique human identity, not its cultivation: "We lost our human image," laments a Jewish father remembering how he had abandoned his wife and children and how he had fought over cigarette stubs in the camps —then he drowns himself.

Fortunately, most Jews managed to retain at least a tenuous grip upon their human image and their will to live. Thus, though only flickering in their manifestations, love, compassion, imagination, and conscience persist in *Tzili.* Heedless of the icy currents, several men try to save the suicide. Haggard refugees share food with Tzili and voice concern for the unborn child she is carrying. And when that fetus dies within Tzili, a prostitute rallies a ragtag band into singing "torchbearers" as they bear her on a stretcher to a relief center. It was surely this stubborn humanness which inspired nascent hope in the thousands who, like Tzili, left Europe after the war for a land where long ago their forefathers heard the voice of Yahweh declaring that among creatures made of dust, man alone bears the image and likeness of God. □

# Economics Made Radical—and Static

**Mancur Olson: *The Rise and Decline of Nations: Economic Growth, Stagflation, and Social Rigidities;* Yale University Press; New Haven, CT.**

**Marshall I. Goldman: *U.S.S.R. In Crisis: The Failure of an Economic System;* W. W. Norton; New York.**

**by William R. Hawkins**

Mancur Olson has written a fair-sized book and spun off several journal articles (many of which have been collected in a companion volume, *The Political Economy of Growth,* edited by Dennis Mueller) in support of a position most people would find intuitively obvious. Olson argues that the reason economies slow down over time is because special-interest groups accumulate in stable societies until their combined weight drags the economy under. Each special-interest group distorts the economy as it diverts resources to its own enrichment and away from the common good. The "common good" is defined as high economic growth which is produced by the efficient use of all resources through the natural workings of the free market.

Individuals can gain in two ways. They can gain a larger slice of economic pie if the pie expands, or they can get a larger slice if they add part of someone else's slice to their own. At any point in time, this second process may provide the larger gain. A glance at the issues which dominate economic policy reveals that distributional issues outweigh growth issues. Politicians maximize their own gain by providing identifiable benefits to special interests while hiding dispersed costs from the general public. By the same logic, general benefits are not as useful to the politicians because the average voter cannot as readily link them to their local representative.

Olson uses the term "distributional coalition" to describe any collective lobby, whether cartel, union, or guild. However, his most persuasive examples come from the behavior of labor unions, which he discusses from the standpoint of macroeconomics, using ideas from labor economists like Albert Rees. Business firms may try to arrange price-fixing coalitions, but they lack the ability to maintain the sort of binding organizations that labor unions form. The lure of "monopoly" profits will always attract new entreprenuers into a market to erode the cartel's position. It is this process, credited to Joseph Schumpeter, which Olson claims is the real meaning of competition. Olson, however, leaves a major distributional coalition out of his formal analysis: the welfare underclass that explicitly trades its votes for income redistribution programs from the public sector. The diversion of capital from investment to entitlements financed by deficits

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dwarfs the distortions created by any other activity.

Olson is a past president of the Public Choice Society, an organ of a particular school of thought to which economists including James Buchanan, Richard McKenzie, and Gordon Tullock belong. Like most members of any school, Olson makes the mistake of trying to explain too much with one variable. He attacks other major schools: the Classical (equilibrium) school because it cannot explain mass unemployment and the Keynesians because they cannot explain simultaneous inflation and unemployment. He also rejects the Monetarists because they claim too much by saying that monetary factors are always decisive. Yet, Olson makes essentially the same claim for his theory, citing examples from a wide variety of countries over a 400-year period. Undoubtedly both special interests and monetary factors have influenced economic activity, but the strength of these factors and how they have interacted with other factors (technology, war, religion, weather, population, etc.) have varied so that no single theory is sufficient. This may be why economics (particularly economic history) as social science has lost ground to economics as theoretical science. Reality has a way of being messy and disrupting compared to the artificial order of abstract theory.

Disturbing to conservatives is the relation Olson postulates between social disorder and economic progress. Olson argues that the Southern states are growing faster than the Northern because the Confederacy lost the Civil War and suffered the turmoil of Reconstruction which broke the power of entrenched interests, thus giving the South a clean slate. Similarly, Japanese and German growth is attributed to the destruction of their social orders by defeat in World War II (the German case aided by the internal destruction of the old order by nazism). French growth benefited by the Revolution and the periodic turmoil since, including occupation in World War II. England, in contrast, is stagnating because it has the longest history in Europe of political stability and victory in war, which has allowed the uninterrupted accumulation of interest groups. At one point he states:

> Now that we are all, I hope, reminded of the overwhelming importance of other considerations in most cases, it should not be misleading to point out this 'revolutionary' implication of the present argument is not always of minor importance. We can now see more clearly that the contention of some conservatives that if social institutions have survived for a long time, they must necessarily be useful to the society, is wrong. We can also appreciate anew Thomas Jefferson's observation that 'the tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.'

Olson's theory overlooks quite a bit and comes perilously close to equating all change with progress. England's political stability and victories in the mercantile wars and in the struggle with Revolutionary France helped to produce its lead in the Industrial Revolution. It did not slow until after 1870, when new distributional forces (to use Olson's framework) gained influence through the expansion of the franchise. The American South (and Southwest) enjoy economic advantages from the lack of labor unions and lower taxation, factors which stem from the social and political conservatism


**In the forthcoming issue of *Chronicles of Culture:***

## Conservatism as Novelty

"Jacques Maritain, besides being one of the most important philosophers of modern times . . . is worthy of being singled out for special praise for the contributions he made to the philosophy of art. . . . Maritain looked upon art as something essential to the human experience. . . . On the one hand, he rejected the notion that art constituted a world unto itself, completely cut off from and independent of the larger world of everyday affairs. On the other hand, he rejected as well the Marxian notion of art, which has it that art is not in any way autonomous and must at every turn serve the ends of the state."

**—from "Preaching and Probing" by Dennis Q. McInerny**

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of these regions. To test Olson's logic, consider its reverse. Would a Southern victory in the Civil War have weakened resistance to unions or the welfare state? Would a London Terror have improved England's performance in the 1800's? In recent times it has not been conservatism but radical change which has produced negative impacts on the economy—and on society.

Olson should have considered more than just Schumpeter's theory of competition. In his classic *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy,* Schumpeter argues that bourgeois liberalism went too far in overthrowing the remnants of feudalism, a process Olson applauds but which Schumpeter feels has left capitalism open to attack from groups Olson fears. To Schumpeter:

> The stock exchange is a poor substitute for the Holy Grail. We have seen that the industrialist and merchant as far as they are entrepreneuers also fill a function of leadership. But economic leadership of this type does not readily expand into the leadership of nations . . . .
>
> The inference is obvious: barring such exceptional conditions, the bourgeois class is ill equipped to face the problems, both domestic and international, that have normally to be faced by a country of any importance.

The aristocratic "steel frame" of society "continued to rule the roost right to the end of the period of intact and vital capitalism." Capitalism is in decline because its supporting social order is in decline.

Olson confuses society with the economy, letting the part swallow the whole in materialistic fashion. It is not the duration of institutions that matters, it is the values they embody (though pernicious doctrines may weaken states so that they do not have the opportunity to become enduring). But values have no place in Olson's theory, which is little more than a mechanical piling up of institutions plotted against the calendar. Without higher values, special interests do dominate.

Olson's theory does have a way to take this into account if he would use it. He draws some distinction between interest groups based on the "size" of their concern. An "encompassing" group identifies its interest with that of the country. He thinks of such groups in terms of their size as a percentage of the wealth or population of the country, but it could also apply to a group which, even if small in number, could by tradition or dedication think in terms of the national interest and act with authority even in the face of special-interest pleading. In a democracy, such a regime would be difficult to establish. It does seem that conservatives have a better record of electing presidents than members of Congress, and within Congress, a better record in the Senate than the House. The larger the constituency, the more weight is carried by issues of national concern as opposed to local or special concern. A president is rated on how well the overall economy or foreign policy or "mood" of the nation is doing, whereas congressmen are rated on how well they keep their fences mended at home. A system which shifted more power to the Executive and less to the Legislature should perform better in the long run. This will mean a reversal of trends since Watergate, which will not set well with the populist wings of either the right or the left.

In support of this is Olson's belief that stronger parties would weaken special interests. Politicians who are strongly linked in the public mind to national parties and their policies will have to act in more responsible ways to ensure overall progress. Of course, a heightened sense of nationalism would need to be an integral part of any such system. However, since nationalism is partially a non-materialist value based on a shared cultural heritage, it escapes Olson's attention.

Olson concentrates on the democratic capitalist nations of the West and their antecedents. The communist states are not mentioned, which is logical considering their lack of pluralistic interest groups. If the West is suffering a "death of a thousand cuts" according to Olson, the East is suffering, according to Marshall Goldman, from a single mortal wound inflicted by state planning.

The Soviet economy is in trouble. The shortages of grain and meat are well known. Even with imports, food rationing has been reintroduced in some areas. Yet some farm lands lie fallow and the crops grown on other fields are plowed under due to a lack of incentives to harvest. Consumer goods are so scarce that not only are long lines and empty shelves commonplace, but workers find that they cannot spend all the money they earn. Goldman contends that what monetary incentives may exist are rendered impotent by this. The progress in electronics and "high tech" which has swept the West has essentially skipped the U.S.S.R., except in the area of certain military applications. Even other areas of major government concern, such as steel production, have slipped in recent years. Most damaging, however, is a fact which Goldman does not mention: that the Soviet Union, alone among the industrial nations, has a decreasing average life expectancy.

Goldman's position is that the "Stalinist Model" of economic development, which has been entrenched in the U.S.S.R. by an aging leadership that knows of nothing better, is to blame. This model concentrates on investment in heavy industry and assumes that a trickle-down effect will benefit light industry and consumer products. This might have some chance of success in an open economy, but in a centrally planned economy with total state ownership of the means of production, nothing happens without orders from the top. Light industry cannot follow heavy industry, and profits and income generated in industry cannot flow to stimulate consumer-goods production unless the planners decree it, and they do not. Though targets are set for the expansion of all parts of the economy, these targets always have to be revised downward, and when this happens heavy industry gets top priority and other sectors



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suffer cuts.

Goldman pays tribute to the many spontaneous and automatic decisions that are made in a market economy and which produce its flexibility and responsiveness to consumer demands. However, it is not clear that Goldman would reject central planning if it would drop the Stalinist Model. He finds it too easy to say that Soviet planning "worked" in the first decades after the revolution. He is impressed by a Soviet national savings rate of 30 percent. Yet Japan has reached this high level of capital formation and several European nations have come close since the end of World War II without resorting to the gulag and the murder of millions of their own citizens. And the capital raised has been better invested.

The concentration on heavy industry did provide the U.S.S.R. with the wherewithal to survive World War II. This raises the question of whether observers like Goldman are looking at matters from the right perspective. The Soviets have an economy geared to military applications rather than to consumer desires because they want it that way, not because they do not know how to produce consumer goods. The Soviets are sometimes compared to the old mercantilist states in that they subordinate the economy to the goal of national power politics. Soviet leaders may see it that way themselves. However, even in this context, the Soviets are not reaching their potential. Their mercantilism suffers an extreme form of the problem suffered by French mercantilism: too much direct government control crowded out individual initiative. British mercantilism was wiser, letting entrepreneurial talent build a prosperous economy with more government support than control. Then in time of crisis, the government could tap these superior resources created by capitalism.

Central planning is handicapped even further in an era of technological revolution. Innovation is by nature impossible to "plan" because it rests on the unknown. Planning is best at quantity production of proven items, not quality production of new items. Thus the Soviet emphasis on buying or stealing new designs which can be copied. Of course, the Soviets cannot be completely written off. Soviet advancement in areas including particle beams and explosive energy generation, concepts American scientists considered impossible, shows that progress can be made under totalitarian rule if enough resources are committed to a project, even if those resources are used inefficiently or their diversion leads to stagnation elsewhere.

"Goldman's book . . . could describe any country in the world. . . . It is not at all obvious that the crisis there is any worse than the crisis here. . . . The book may be most interesting as a mirror reflecting our own economic problems."

—*The Atlantic*

The books by Olson and Goldman do not just describe possible causes of the decline of both capitalistic and communistic economies. They also highlight another aspect of the confrontation between the two social systems. The West has a superior economy but lacks any coherent direction. Atomistic interest groups preclude the summoning of any will to concerted action, even the will to grow and possibly the will to survive. The East has an inferior economy, but the single-minded purpose only totalitarians can muster. They have a will to power. The question is whether unorganized superior resources can prevail against organized forces resting on an inferior material base. History is replete with examples of comparatively advanced civilizations being overthrown by "barbarians," though the West did rally in two World Wars to defeat aggression. The question remains open with optimism a scarce commodity. □

# The Commodities Exchange

**Sue Davidson Lowe: *Stieglitz: A Memoir/Biography;* Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.**

**by Linda Thorne**

In two recent issues, *The Atlantic* excerpted portions of Robert A. Caro's biography of Lyndon Johnson, *The Path to Power.* The second installment focused on Johnson's love affair with a woman named Alice Glass, conducted while he was a young married Congressman and she was the live-in mistress of one of his mentors, the publisher of the *Austin American-Statesman.* Even though the chapter describing the affair comprises only 14 pages out of a total of 768, doubtless more than a few copies of the book were sold to a lascivious public eager for still more details of Johnson's love life. The editors of *Vogue,* by way of introducing an excerpt from Norman Mailer's *Ancient Evenings,* say: "It is lush, sensuous, sexual beyond gender." (No matter that "sexual beyond gender" is an apparent contradiction. Much of Madison Avenue ad-talk is.) While *Vogue* devotes roughly a page and a half to Mr. Mailer's book, *Playboy,* which bills it as his "wild new Egyptian novel," gives it substantially more exposure in two separate issues, complete with provocative illustrations. One would never know, from the treatment it is currently being accorded in fashion magazines, that the critics had generally panned the book, and one would never know from *Atlantic's* coverage that Johnson's amour was of little consequence. About the only truth in modern advertising is this: Sex sells the product—whether it's designer jeans, cologne, beer, or a glossy magazine ex-

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cerpting what purports to be a serious piece of literature. With this in mind, magazine publishers pander to a panting public.

The commercialization of the artist and his art is something that Alfred Stieglitz abhorred and fought against throughout his life. Stieglitz insisted on the intrinsic value of amateurism, on art for art's sake. He refused to function as a dealer in the ordinary sense or to run a gallery that was interested in profits. Instead, he sought for his artists—who included Edward Steichen, Paul Strand, Charles Demuth, and Georgia O'Keeffe—a form of patronage on the Medici pattern and operated his gallery on a collective basis, with the artists themselves contributing what they could afford. Rank commercialism was, to Stieglitz, equivalent to whoring—it was also at the bottom of his long-standing rift with onetime disciple Steichen. It was Stieglitz who introduced Steichen to the Condé Nast organization, which resulted in a long-lived relationship between the publisher and the photographer. Steichen was originally hired to provide art portraits of celebrities —from writers to statesmen to movie stars—and quality fashion illustrations. It was not long before Steichen became Frank Crowinshield's prize photographer at *Vanity Fair*, and soon he was taking on assignments in advertising as well.

That is not to say that Stieglitz totally rejected the idea of the marketplace. During the summer of 1939, he raised few objections when Georgia O'Keeffe, to whom he was married, undertook a commission for the Dole Company. In exchange for two paintings, not necessarily of pineapples, which Dole would use as advertisements, she got an expense-free trip to Honolulu. While O'Keeffe painted prolifically when she was in Hawaii, it seems she did not produce one pineapple. After returning to New York, she presented Dole with two small oils: one of a ginger flower and the other of a papaya tree. Dole, whose major competitor marketed papaya, flatly rejected the latter. O'Keeffe, who had been told she could paint whatever she chose, was furious. Dole responded by shipping a huge pineapple plant to the Stieglitz-O'Keeffe household, which O'Keeffe reluctantly agreed to paint. This is one of the few light moments in a book that is otherwise rather dry and turgid.

Sue Davidson Lowe is Alfred Stieglitz's grandniece, the granddaughter of his brother, Leopold. *Stieglitz: A Memoir/Biography* is her first book. While a book's first paragraph is not necessarily an accurate indicator of all that follows, it is unfortunately true here:

> In my sixth summer—Uncle Al's sixty-fifth—I was invited for the first time to watch him and his friend Louis Kalonyme play a round or two of Tom Thumb Golf, the rage of the 1929 season, following their morning walk to the village, three-quarters of a mile south of the Hill. The village, formerly known as Caldwell, was the small town of Lake George, on the southwest shore of the lower Adirondack lake. Kalonyme was a journalist and art critic, a witty, olive-skinned man with hooded peridot eyes. The Hill—the forty-acre upland remnant of a waterfront estate, Oaklawn, bought in 1886 by Edward Stieglitz—was the summer compound of his children, among whom were my maternal grandfather Lee and his elder brother, Uncle Al. Uncle Al was Alfred Stieglitz—photographer extraordinaire, art entrepreneur, one-time publisher and editor, and full-time idiosyncratic moralist.

What follows is a tale of too many petty and prolonged domestic squabbles at Lake George, punctuated by visits from the famous and the nearly so, and very little emphasis on the development of Stieglitz as artist and the relevance of his art to its time. A recitation of eccentricities may have some merit if it leads to an understanding of artistic genius, but Lowe seems to feel compelled to catalog those of the entire Stieglitz clan. What she ends up with is more a history of the Stieglitz family than a biography of Alfred Stieglitz the man and artist. Appropriately for a book whose subject is a man who elevated photography to an art form, Lowe represents Stieglitz both pictorially and in prose. In her selection of photos, though, she again errs in focusing too much on the man and his family and too little on his art. Of the more than 50 illustrations, most are family snapshots, many of them by Stieglitz himself. Not one of Stieglitz's famous images —"Spring Showers," "The Steerage," "Icy Night," and "Winter—Fifth Avenue" —is reproduced.

Ironically, Stieglitz has become, at the hands of his grandniece, just another commodity for sale in the modern marketplace. The book's dust jacket carries a portrait of the artist as a young man—a dark-eyed, brooding, mustachioed fellow whose good looks are sure to turn a few heads, even among the stiff competition on the bookseller's shelves. Caveat

## In the Mail

***Why Strategic Superiority Matters* by Robert Jastrow; The Orwell Press; New York.** The Soviets are convinced. The U.S. may not be until it really doesn't matter any longer.

***Our Enemy, The State* by Albert Jay Nock; Hallberg; Delavan, WI.** Still accurate after all these years (nearly 50).

***A Variorum Edition of The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, Vol. II, The Canterbury Tales, Part Three, the Miller's Tale* edited by Thomas W. Ross; University of Oklahoma Press; Norman.** Chaucer scholars need only be alerted to the existence of this finely prepared book.

***Mr. Jefferson* by Albert Jay Nock; Hallberg; Delavan, WI.** Rare insights about the famous redhead.



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emptor: If the expensive price tag does not discourage, the vacuous contents should. Sue Davidson Lowe has no lack of affection or respect for her Uncle Al and says so herself:

> It was not until 1932 or 1933, when I was ten or eleven years old, that I began to sense the deep respect in which he was held even by the artist and writer friends who visited him at Lake George; it would take considerably longer for me to learn that references to a world-wide reputation were not hyperbole.

Unfortunately, today, at age 61, she has yet to fully comprehend what Alfred Stieglitz was all about. □

# Tales of the Unknown

**Howard Gardner: *Art, Mind, and Brain: A Cognitive Approach to Creativity;* Basic Books; New York.**

**by David A. Hallman**

A strong case can be made that Western culture began to define itself with the remarkable conjunction of art and philosophy which emerged in Periclean Athens during the fifth century B.C. Arguably, also, the "decline of the West" began—or at least accelerated—with the development of modern psychology as a popular pseudoscience during the current century. The trivialization of philosophical inquiry in modern thought opened the gates wide for what might be called the "Humanistic Fallacy" of developmental and therapeutic psychology: that is, psychology as a "social science." The classical attempt to *understand* man's complex relationships to the mysteries of nature and life was crudely transformed into an effort to *explain*—and, by natural extension, to *control*—that has turned into the bizarre Theater of Contemporary Psychology. What Allen Tate once called the "modern squirrel cage of our sensibility, the extreme introspection of our time," may well have produced the ultimate Frankenstein monster, a self-consciousness that paralyzes instead of liberates and which finally destroys the very phenomena it seeks to explain.

*Dr. Hallman is with the English department at James Madison University.*

To the ancients, the intimate relationship between art and philosophy must have seemed natural. From the beginning of sophisticated aesthetic thought, art was judged as an "imitation" of that life the philosophers sought to understand—a pejorative to Plato, but to Aristotle a profound statement of the possibilities of life. But in the modern world, as philosophy has become more abstruse and removed from the "human" concerns of the *homme bourgeois* (existentialism is the obvious and rebellious exception here), its role of seer and mentor has been assumed by psychology, which should have been philosophy's younger sister in the humanities, but which instead revealed itself as an unfaithful relation: an intellectual transvestite—or even transsexual—ally of the social sciences. Instead of "interpreting" the mysteries, modern psychology "explains" them away. Once we are educated to our lives, we are able to cope with that which our ignorant ancestors thought inexplicable. In effect, we have swapped the Oracle at Delphi for the twin oracles of "Dear Abby" and "Ann Landers." Or perhaps we ourselves have just become irrelevant to the great traditions of philosophy, and maybe the relationship of art to psychology in our time is just as intimate and natural—and as profound a reflection of our own sensibilities—as was the classical marriage.

Certainly the influence of psychology on modern art—both popular and high—is almost all-pervasive. Freud and Jung themselves, not to mention the behaviorists and others, permeate modern art in all of its forms. For better or worse, the psychologists have created our sensibilities just as extensively as Plato and Aristotle created those of their own and later cultures. And much of this modern intercourse has been fruitful. Carl Jung's influence on T. S. Eliot alone would justify his sometimes-quirky work; Freud's thought is so pervasive in modern mind, literature, and criticism (although it is often simplistically adapted and misunderstood by both writers and audiences) that even today we are confronted with such overtly Freudian novels as D. M. Thomas's *The White Hotel,* Philip Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint,* and countless others. But it is questionable whether the role of psychology, either in art or in our private and public sensibilities (if these can be separated), has been efficacious on the whole. Tate's comment on our "extreme introspection" suggests a protest against the narcissism and self-conscious reflection that psychology forces on individuals, which is reflected in much art. Such solipsism (another term Tate uses to "denote the failure of the human personality to function objectively in nature and society") can cause a paralysis of will: Hamlet, the quintessential modern man, complains in his great soliloquy on indecisiveness that his "native hue of resolution/ Is sicklied over with the pale cast of thought." It is therefore unsettling to find psychol-



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ogists, under the guise of a scientific quest, struggling to explore perhaps the greatest mystery of human nature: that of the creative imagination. Not that we weren't warned. In 1917, Oswald Spengler, in *The Decline of the West,* described the threat of the scientific attitude:

> Reason, system and comprehension kill as they 'cognize.' That which is cognized becomes a rigid object, capable of measurement and subdivision. Intuitive vision, on the other hand, vivifies and incorporates the details in a living inwardly-felt unity. Poetry and historical study are kin. Calculation and cognition also are kin.

Howard Gardner is a "cognitive" psychologist and a recipient of one of the lucrative MacArthur Foundation Fellowships awarded annually to "exceptionally talented individuals" who have shown significant achievement in the humanities, sciences, or just about any other intellectual realm. He is also a member of Harvard's Project Zero, a research team dedicated to "unravel the nature of artistic thinking." *Art, Mind and Brain: A Cognitive Approach to Creativity* is a collection of essays drawn from Gardner's study and organized so as to give a summary overview of this last frontier of psychological inquiry. (Indeed, the very title of the project was chosen to indicate that the researchers were hoping to add substantive knowledge to an area where "virtually 'zero' was known.") The book's separate essays survey the early work of such pioneers as Jean Piaget, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Ernst Cassirer, and Gardner's own mentor and fellow project member, Harvard philosopher Nelson Goodman. A second section is devoted to Gardner's especial interest in the creative impulses of young children; other groupings deal with the cultural consequences of mass media, and the effects on the imagination of mental breakdown. Having established the backgrounds and fundamental points of his own thought, Gardner offers a discussion of the creative impulses that have marked the great masters who carried their creativity with them into old age; he concludes with a consideration of Mozart, perhaps the most atypical, magical, and inexplicable creative genius of all. Gardner's book is interesting mainly for its general background and perspective on the question of the creative imagination and as a fairly straightforward exposition of his own ideas. Unfortunately, for all its clear organization and careful development, the reader is apt to feel as unenlightened at the end as when he started. It seems, simply, that not very much is known—or perhaps can be known—about the mysteries of creativity, even to the self-proclaimed specialists. From that, I think, we can all take some faint hope.

To the lay reader, many of the academic specialist's questions—especially those involved in some kind of "scientific" inquiry—may seem, well, rather academic. Not many people are prepared to become exercised by the Scholastics' puzzle about the exact number of angels able to dance on the head of a pin, and, by the same token, many of the psychologist's questions, and answers, often seem simplistic and obvious, if not patently irrelevant. And although Gardner often falls into this trap, he must be granted the license due to any scientist starting at point "zero" in his inquiry. At the risk of his own dignity, the researcher must be prepared to ask questions which to the layman may appear obvious to the point of triteness. Gardner seems to build the scaffold of his inquiry on just such points.

The book abounds with the sort of "how" and "why" questions that offer interesting possibilities for discussion but which remain ultimately unanswerable, especially in the context of the imagination. There is room aplenty for speculation, and the first section of Gardner's book is a useful survey of some of the earlier studies in imaginative development. The relationship of language to perception and thus to the imaginative faculty is central, of course, and Gardner begins with the Swiss biologist-turned-child-psychologist Jean Piaget, to whom linguistic ability was essentially a part of the normal growth and development patterns of the human mind. For Piaget, whom Gardner characterizes with mixed affection as a "Swiss watchmaker poring over an unassembled instrument," artistic and imaginative activities were less interesting than the day-to-day processes of functional development. Piaget is contrasted initially with the American linguist Noam Chomsky, whose views on the sources of language are, to be charitable, more interesting than his much-publicized political ideas. The two men met in a famous debate in Paris in 1975, and the encounter set forth the main lines of argument between the Piagetian developmental school and those thinkers who see language as having certain innately symbolic qualities and thus, by its very nature, as a "creative" expression. To Chomsky, language ability seems a kind of Jungian collective universal, always present and waiting only to be tapped. Like the liver or the heart, in Chomsky's metaphor, the mind is an organ of the body (albeit a symbol-creating one), maturing but functioning from birth. The problem as posed, then, pits the mind as a developing, "learning" faculty which achieves an ability to use language in a symbolic capacity against the concept of linguistic and symbolic sensitivity as an inherited and universal human characteristic.

Successive chapters place increasing emphasis on the symbolic or "mythopoeic" powers of language. To Claude Lévi-Strauss, myth serves as a cultural "mask"—a communal symbol—which language serves by conveying. Primitive arts, which are so closely akin in form and style to the linguistic and visual creations of children, are expressions of shared symbols; the move toward individualism in the modern arts suggests a breakdown in the communal soul and so explains much of the apparent chaos of modern culture. To philosophers like Ernst Cassirer and Susanne Langer, symbol-making is an innate human need; indeed, the mythopoeic, symbolic im-



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pulse perhaps most distinctively sets us apart from the lower forms. As Langer has so poetically expressed her insight, "Of all born creatures, man is the only one that cannot live by bread alone."

Gardner is especially interesting in his discussions of the actual creative expressions, both linguistic and visual, of children. The developmental tendency toward realism in both perceptions and creations presents a uniquely exciting problem for study. Why, for instance, do children in their early stages of linguistic growth show such a happy and natural affinity for metaphor (he cites charming examples of a young child who describes her naked body as "'barefoot all over,'" and another who sees a trail of vapor left by a skywriting plane as "'a scar in the sky'") only to pass into a literal-minded stage which demands realistic presentation at the expense of metaphorical fancy? And why does children's art—those surrealistic drawings which often seem so revealing and archetypal in their distortions—give way with the advent of social maturity to the demands for representational naturalism? And what, finally, can be made of the self-conscious return to the primitive in so many moderns? To review a chronological perspective of Picasso's art is to be exposed to more lessons on the creative impulse than the whole history of psychology affords. Fittingly, the master himself is quoted on his "development": "I used to draw like Raphael, but it has taken me a whole lifetime to learn to draw like a child."

If such questions are baffling, Gardner usually has enough humility and caution to confess his ignorance. He poses, for instance, such unanswerable questions as why certain children seem to lose their creative instincts forever at an early stage while others regain them with a renewed vigor after languishing through adolescence. How are we to understand the prodigy (Mozart is the example par excellence) who develops his talent almost without interruption right into maturity, or those few masters (Verdi, Thomas Mann, W. B. Yeats, Picasso) who seem to retain their creative powers to the ends of their long lives? (Interestingly, Gardner does not deal at all with the phenomenon of performing musicians who seem, of all artists, to have the key to longevity.) Is it valid, in the first place, to discuss the "creations" of children—whether striking figures of speech or hauntingly expressive drawings—as *art?* And, perhaps most important, what is the role of the individual talent; "why" or "how" do some individuals create more and with acknowledged higher talent than others? On such questions, Gardner's answers tend to be limp and unsatisfactory: A supportive environment will encourage the budding artist, and it helps if the artist has a consuming interest in his work, and so on. At some points, though, the psychologist admits his ignorance of the whole affair.

Gardner's book is obviously intended as an inconclusive progress report on his project's work. As one who has, for about four years, observed firsthand the imaginative development of a lively and bright child, I find Gardner's study interesting but ultimately unsatisfactory—as he would probably admit. I must confess that I am not wholly sympathetic to his mission. Mysteries, as such, are important. I, for one—and I am not frivolous here—am eternally against those scholars who are always searching for Loch Ness Monsters, or Abominable Snowmen, or the true author of Shakespeare's plays; something indefinable but irreplaceable would be lost if "positive" answers to these questions were ever found. But this prejudice, which I hope is only human, points to what I believe is the book's most serious flaw: a sin of omission.

## LIBERAL CULTURE

### *Drugs & Other Toxic Wastes*

Timothy Leary, who should be known as Dr. Doom rather than as Uncle Tim, is back on the TV talk-show/college circuit again, his eyes betraying the same vacancy that they've displayed for some 20 years. Leary, in a recent newspaper interview, was asked whether he still takes drugs. Yes. Does he still take LSD, the drug that he touted and which has destroyed countless lives (our interpretation: the interviewer would never dare alienate the man with the truth)? No. Leary went on to remark:

> The ones I use are improved drugs, which increase intelligence and improve memory.

Given (A) his past exploits and (B) his recent comments (e.g., "All drugs will be legalized within ten years"), it's evident that Leary would need the output of an entire pharmaceutical facility to provide the drugs needed to improve his intelligence and memory to the level of one of our simian ancestors. □



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As a psychologist, Gardner is strangely silent on two modern figures who would seem to be indispensable to his study. Sigmund Freud is mentioned only casually and in passing; Carl Jung is not alluded to by name at all. Freud's notion of the neurotic foundation of art is well known, if not notorious, and is understandably repugnant to Gardner's cognitive discipline. Jung, though, with his emphasis on the collective unconscious as a repository of symbols and myths, would seem to be more relevant, if not more congenial, to the study at hand. But despite his famous attribution of the artistic impulses to the deep recesses of the psyche, Jung places those impulses outside the proper realm of psychology and even asserts that the attempt to *explain* the relationship between the art object and the creative process is invalid *because* it is scientific. "The creative aspect of life which finds its clearest expression in art," he writes, "baffles all attempts at rational formulation .... creative art will forever elude understanding." And again: "Creative man is a riddle we try to solve in vain." However hostile it may be to Gardner, one suspects that Jung's respect for the privacy and mystery of the creative imagination has more appeal to the artists themselves than the project which would explain them. Henry James once wrote that all we can "see of the charm-compeller is the back he turns to us as he bends over his work." In this context, we might ask whether anything was really learned by viewing the *other* side of the moon. □

# Creative Writing 101

**Mary Morris: *Crossroads;* Houghton Mifflin; Boston.**

**Chuck Wachtel: *Joe The Engineer;* William Morrow; New York.**

**by Eugene England**

The authors of these two books seem to be nice, earnest young people, and their work already has been highly praised. Part of the reason behind this praise is clear: these first novels, both about failing marriages, about "finding oneself," about vulnerability in the irrational but implacable rush of urban life, are fetchingly "with it." These writers give us cool, knowing humor, convincing New York local color, satire on various forms of Manhattan chic, from grubby to professional, and trendy experimentation with point of view. And, as the promotional copy insists, both are "compassionate": they want to say something important about being human.

*Dr. England is with the English department at Brigham Young University.*

But ability, knowledge, even what is misnamed compassion, are not enough. Apparently, young writers have heard in their writing classes "Show, don't tell," to the point where they have forgotten that language *must* tell (subtly, precisely, of course); thus, they seem unable to tell their readers what the lives of their protagonists mean. They can only show what it looks like. If an author believes that pain and futility are imposed upon us by the system, the universe, fate, *something* outside us and that therefore our basic moral responsibility is sympathy, then he or she cannot make essential judgments about characters nor give readers what they need to make their own judgments about "life" or to endure it. And if an author thinks breadth and intensity of experience is all that literature should provide, then he will not give understanding. Great literature has always provided both show *and* tell, sympathy *and* judgment, both experience *and* understanding. Too many in our time, including Morris and Wachtel, have forgotten.

But both do deserve some praise, especially Mary Morris, who has more skill and, I think, more independence from current fashion than Chuck Wachtel. *Joe The Engineer* has been compared to *Marty* and, indeed, it gets inside the stereotypical New York workingman's confined, bar-to-bed-to-boredom existence. Marty was able to reach past that quotidian reality and order it into meaning with a decision for marriage—to a plain, unsexy, brighter woman. Joe also attempts to "search for himself and for salvation from a life of futility," but he seems unable to make *any* decision, even to save his marriage—to a brighter, more ambitious, and decisive woman.

Wachtel reveals all the forces arrayed against Joe—his narrow family conditioning, traumatic Vietnam service, limited intelligence and perspective. And Wachtel is good at conveying both the honorable working life of Joe (and of his wife, a waitress) and also his undirected yearning for something more:

> Sometimes when he's walking around like this in somebody's basement, he walks out of himself for a while and just wanders around in their lives. He stops being a person who . . . is completely absorbed in the things they do and own. He likes the feeling. He becomes a ghost.

"[Chuck Wachtel is] solidly in the tradition of the best American proletarian writers. *Joe the Engineer* is a passionate, political—and important—book."
***—Village Voice***

Wachtel obviously *wants* to tell us something about how to make sense of life's seemingly random, fated particulars. His failure is not in purpose but in means.

Morris has better means. Her first-person narrator/heroine, Debbie, gets into our hearts quickly. Debbie's voice is a fine element of her characterization —fluent, witty, slightly obtuse, off-balance, occasionally brave, often fright-



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ened, sometimes out of control. Morris gives her a device that works well both to provide humor and to reveal essential character—an unexpected undercutting or change of direction at the end of a paragraph or the beginning of the next: "If my life with Mark was one of simple, changeless passion, my life after he left me became equally simple—a rather straightforward and primitive desire for revenge." And Morris periodically succeeds in getting her own language and vision into her narrator's voice without intruding: On meeting the woman who has seduced her husband, Debbie reports: "She was transparent and tough as a spider's web and with about as much substance. I memorized her, the way a spy memorizes his instructions before setting them on fire."

Morris is perhaps best with anecdotes, little scenes of sudden revelation, like this one a few days after Debbie's husband left her:

> I found a wet puppy shivering in the rain. I took the dog by its clutch collar and led it to the address on its tag. I rang the bell, and a tall, heavyset woman in black toreador pants stormed down the stair, shouting at me. 'What're you doing? Why did you ring that bell?' When she saw my face distort and saw her shivering hound, she began apologizing and even ran after me a little way as I dashed down the street. In the end, it was the dog and his screaming mistress who made me feel lost and destitute in the world, more than Mark and the note he'd left on the kitchen table.

But Morris, like Wachtel, suffers from a lack of careful thinking and workmanship, of intelligent fitting of means to desired end. This failure of both writers is most evident perhaps in their attempts at using an innovative point of view. Wachtel uses a narrative voice that tries to have it both ways, moving from his own exterior vision into Joe's mind and voice and back out: "Joe The Engineer's sitting on one of the two toilets in the men's room of Mary's Bar and Grill trying to figure out why some things stick in his mind while others pass freely and, dammit, untraceably out of it." The present tense is sometimes intended to give Joe's experience timeless universality, the omniscient voice to give it meaning, and the moving into Joe's consciousness to promote sympathy. But the unusual tense is usually irritating and, like Wachtel's intrusive voice, often productive of platitudes rather than intelligent commentary: "Joe never felt particularly close to Sonny, but he was a star in the constellation of adults that formed around him when he was growing up. When one goes out it always gets darker." And by giving his voice and mind over to Joe's, Wachtel not only is guilty of condescension but also pays the price of imitative form: trying to use language merely to *imitate* experience—crudeness to copy the crude, incoherence to suggest life's irrationality, and boring, meaningless repetition to reproduce its absurd blankness—surrenders the powers of language to chaos. Language can do more; it has built the magnificent heritage of our literature by doing so. What one wants is not mere imitation of life—however apt or unusual, "broadening." What one wants from reading is *understanding*, and the author must help.

Morris tries for understanding by moving in the opposite direction from Wachtel: she starts with a sympathetic first-person narrator who is limited somewhat in her ability to provide understanding by the very blindnesses and perversities that help win our sympathy. Then Morris tries to transcend that limitation by inserting her own perspective and reaching for large meanings beyond the ability of Debbie to express. But the edges of the patches show; the occasions where she wants to show more than her narrator sees and to judge her are too obvious—and Morris's own moral confusion and ambivalence too pervasive—to permit us more subtle judgments. And, although she tries to extend Debbie's small revenge to universal significance with a *Moby-Dick* reference or two, it is simply unbelievable that Debbie would know the book well enough for portentous reflections and dreams about white whales, which are obviously those of an English teacher like Morris.

You simply can't have it both ways. Yes, as masters like James and Conrad have shown, a writer can increase sympathy by locating his narrative point of view in a central consciousness; but the further that consciousness is removed from the quality of thought and language *the writer* is capable of, the more he is hobbled. Point of view must be responsibly maintained by the author. Irresponsibility is shown when Morris and Wachtel, having given up straightforward, intelligent narration and careful, subtle, moral assessment, compensate with efforts for meaning that are merely sentimental or pretentious. These authors simply cop out concerning the central issue of their books: their sympathetic protagonists' ability to control and take responsibility for their own lives.

For instance, it is baffling how Morris and Wachtel can see so clearly the destructive effects of casual or lustful sex on their characters and yet not hold them

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responsible. Yes, I know that sexual encounter has become the chief means of expressing freedom and control of one's life, of finding "meaning," even simple adventure, in a world that seems increasingly regimented and senseless. And I know that every "with it" author and director must show us this in wonderful detail. But there is a terrible irony, unrecognized by Wachtel or Morris, in showing protagonists who engage in sexual adventure as an expression of liberation and self-direction and at the same time implying, even claiming, moral justification for them on the ground that lust is irresistible. Each shows graphically the devastating effects of infidelity —the loss of self-respect, even of self, the wounds and corrosive jealousies despite all the claims for tolerant maturity—but makes no connection between that and the failure of the hero's "search for himself and for salvation from a life of futility."

Ultimately, the failure is in the authors themselves. Before Wachtel can give us hemmed-in blue-collar protagonists able to emerge as significant and self-directed, he must himself believe in both individual responsibility and meaningful connections; he must understand that persons *can* control themselves and their appetites, can make covenants and keep them. Since for Joe there is only lust, whether with his wife or a casual pick-up, his "screw-ups" are merely literal. And Morris cannot help us understand how a woman can find herself if she simply empathizes with her heroine's confusion, as exemplified by the account of Debbie's first casual, uncontrolled (and supposedly uncontrollable) sexual encounter after separating from her husband:

> I didn't want to go but I found myself walking, climbing the stairs. . . . The whole house, I suddenly realized, was done in yellow wall-to-wall carpeting. I thought to myself, I can't make love with yellow carpeting everywhere. And suddenly it was the carpeting and not the arms of an eighteen-year-old boy I couldn't bear.

As the understandable confusion of a newly deserted woman this might be passable, but it continues throughout the novel. Sex is treated as either overpowering or a willed solution to problems ranging from loneliness to boredom. It is neither, of course, but rather a confirmation of unconditional as well as romantic love and thus an expression of willingness to bear responsibility for what love produces, including children. Sexual intercourse is the ultimate expression of the individual in relationship and of our ability to create new things, including life, in such relationships; when that expression is made in a context that does not include total fidelity to the partner and readiness (including stable marriage) to accept *all* the implied results then it is inherently corrupt and corrupting. The evidence of all major moral codes, of history, and of great literature support that conclusion and its consequences. Morris and Wachtel give further evidence, but they do not accept the consequences. □

# Historians as Used-Car Salesmen

**Ground Zero: *What About the Russians—and Nuclear War?* Pocket Books; New York.**

**Geoffrey Barraclough: *From Agadir to Armageddon;* Holmes & Meier; New York.**

**by Alan J. Levine**

*What About the Russians—and Nuclear War?* is the work of the disarmament organization Ground Zero, a volume crafted—of course—to support the nuclear-freeze movement. It has been said that an elephant is an animal designed by a committee; this book, created by dozens of people under the loose direction of Earl and Roger Molander, is in the elephant tradition, with all the irregularities that that implies. It is also a contribution to a less glorious tradition—that of twisting history for political purposes. On the whole, this book is not as awful as it could have been, given its political orientation. Which does not mean, however, that it is good. It is not grossly inaccurate; it is slanted and simplistic, which may be much worse.

Ground Zero's interpretation of the Soviet regime contains a curious contradiction. It argues that the Soviet regime is a logical end product of an inflexible, monolithic Russian tradition, emphasizing Russian rigidity and changelessness, but it suggests that the Soviet regime itself is more flexible than it is usually given credit for. It attributes Soviet foreign policy to the alleged necessities and influences of Russian history. Russians, ever since the Mongol conquest, have been obsessed about invasions, with which they have been often menaced:

> The frequent invasions have created an obsession about security on its borders. The response has been expansion into adjacent areas where possible, epitomized in the Soviet determination to retain its buffer of Eastern European satellite states and its near-paranoia at the prospect of Western European deployment of cruise and Pershing missiles, which could overfly those European borders with ease.

According to Ground Zero, Russians are xenophobic and feel inferior to Western Europeans. The unattractive side of the Russians derives from this tragic insecurity.

This notion of Russian history, which comes close to arguing that Stalin's monstrous regime was practically the Russian norm, is ridiculously simplistic. It is a readily verifiable fact that Russia has suffered much less from invasion in modern times than most continental European

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countries; it is the Russians, not their neighbors, who have formed the empire that has been dominating Eastern Europe for centuries. Nor have Russians exhibited xenophobic or inferiority "symptoms" to a greater extent than other peoples. Eighteenth- and 19th-century Russia, with its cosmopolitan French-speaking aristocracy and burning interest in things Western European, was not a society dominated by fear of or isolation from the West. The statesmen of Imperial Russia exhibited grandiose overconfidence, not fear, paranoid or otherwise, of invasion. Attitudes cannot be pigeonholed, as the writers try to do, into a simple, lasting conflict between a good "cosmopolitan, international and pro-Western outlook" and a bad "isolationist, Slavophile, anti-Western, anti-détente outlook." To view "Slavophile" attitudes as some sort of key to the present regime, as Ground Zero seems to, is absurd. The Slavophiles were a 19th-century intellectual group with little lasting impact (moreover, they were often liberal and pacifist). Marxism-Leninism clearly derives from the "Westernized" side of the Russians.

The authors appear to be virtually obsessed with psychologizing, with discussing "images" allegedly held by one side or the other, rather than with the examination of reality, much less normative judgments. It is stated, for example, that the Great Purges established an "image" in the West of the U.S.S.R. as a totalitarian state under a ruthless dictatorship hostile to a free society. Certainly that is not entirely true, as evidenced by the number of people who bought the Stalinist version of the purges; surely the real problem was that the image of the inhuman regime corresponded quite well with reality.

Ground Zero perpetuates more than a few myths. Without quite endorsing it, the authors insinuate that Stalin's policies in the 1930's were a wise attempt to prepare for war and were vindicated by World War II. (Murdering and imprisoning top military men and technicians might be considered by some as an odd way to get ready for war.) Though the authors do not quite endorse the revisionist version of the Cold War, they do transmit quite a few distortions, recounting various events with a peculiar emphasis, and implying that it was the West's "challenge" to the communist takeover of Eastern Europe that started the Cold

War. The authors falsely claim that the Soviets kept their forces in Iran solely to obtain oil as "reparations"; in reality, even Stalin did not have the gall to demand reparations from a country which had not attacked the U.S.S.R. Only one with a very peculiar and biased politics could declare that Greece in 1947 was a "Fascist monarchy" and claim that Truman thus lied to the American people in his "Truman Doctrine" speech. In general, the version of the Cold War proffered here is marked by ambiguity, euphemism, and an attempt to minimize recent Soviet gains. There is no straightforward analysis of either side's aims or actions. One can only smile when told that Nixon and Brezhnev decided on détente because it would prevent a "costly arms race." Given their addiction to liberal arms-control orthodoxy, the writers do not appreciate the irony of calling the ABM treaty the "paramount accomplishment of arms control to date." Détente was crippled, it is suggested, not by Soviet actions, which allegedly brought them only "meager success" in the Third World, but by the American political opposition's criticism in the 1976 campaign. Among other things, this thesis does less than justice to Jimmy Carter's valiant rearguard action against reality—a struggle that Ground Zero is trying to continue.

* * *

Geoffrey Barraclough is a well-known British historian; as a distinguished expert on the Middle Ages, he has made many unimpressive forays into 20th-century history. *From Agadir to Armageddon* will not add to his reputation; it is another frog croak in the disarmament-equals-peace chorus. It is an exercise in confusion, false analogy, and propaganda rather than history, based on the fancy that today's international situation is akin to that of the pre-World War I era. To Barraclough there is literally no basic difference between the world of today and that of 1911, except that the weapons have become more destructive. In the course of this book, however, he shows that he understands neither the world of today nor the very different one of 70 years ago.

Barraclough provides a study of the Moroccan crisis of 1911, which he sees as a decisive step toward war—though the crisis was in fact resolved—and as an event that exposed the "real" nature of the pre-1914 international system. That system, and today's, is seen by Barraclough largely through the distorting prism of the Hobson myth of imperialism and the strange notion that pre-1914 Europe was a homogeneous society on the verge of revolutionary unrest and breakdown whose ruling class was responsible for the disasters of 1914-1918. (Once or twice he appears to toy with the notion of a uniquely evil Germany, but he fails to deal with the contradiction this involves.) The absurdities here are legion—it may, for example, surprise historians to learn that there was no important difference either in politics or society between Edwardian Britain and Imperial Russia.

The selection of the Moroccan crisis as the turning point in the road to war



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makes as little sense as Barraclough's view of prewar society. World War I began between the eastern- and central-European empires over a crisis in the Balkans that affected the European power balance; the Moroccan problem, like every other colonial issue between the Great Powers from 1815 to 1914, was resolved by compromise. Had colonies and the underdeveloped world been the decisive issue before World War I, the Triple Entente could never have come into existence. Conflicts over colonial issues were more numerous and more serious between Britain and Russia, as well as Britain and France, than between any of the future allies and the Central Powers. Even Barraclough admits that by 1914 colonial issues had become merely a diversion, but this recognition of the obvious has no influence on his basic thesis.

The climax of the book is Barraclough's discovery that the underlying pattern of today's international politics is "strikingly similar" to his version of the past. The United States and the Soviet Union are in the same position as Britain and Imperial Germany in 1911. The United States is just "defending an empire" in the Middle East. Any assertion to the contrary just shows the extent to which we are dominated by "imperialist" thinking. In Barraclough's phantasmagoric world, the Soviets are not exactly good guys, but they are playing by the traditional imperialist rules; maybe they are just playing a defensive game. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, after all, was provoked by the Americans, it is claimed; the Soviets are only defending their sphere of influence. As did the British Foreign Office in 1911, Barraclough insists, the American leaders are erroneously basing their policy on "mutual suspicion," and this is "bound to lead to an explosion." The rather tiresome question of whether their suspicions might be justified is one that Barraclough, like the Ground Zero crew, would prefer to avoid. □

# TV News & Other Fixed Games of Chance

**Stephan Lesher: *Media Unbound: The Impact of Television Journalism on the Public;* Houghton Mifflin; Boston.**

**by Herbert I. London**

It is apparent from Stephan Lesher's *Media Unbound* that television journalism is to journalism what plastic decorations are to flora. In the television era, it seems, whatever is presented is thus newsworthy—a tautology that can have meaning only for the progeny of McLuhan. Essentially, this book is a television book: headlines and occasionally riveting stories are presented, but one hopes in vain for explanations and ratiocination. For example, the following critical and poignant questions are mentioned in the book, yet they are treated superficially, obliquely, or not at all. Does television news make journalism's weaknesses manifest, as Mr. Lesher asserts, or does it create a unique set of journalistic problems all its own? Do distortions result from the nature of journalism—again as Lesher indicates—or from the intrinsic prejudice of journalists trained in an ambience that confuses liberal judgment with truth? Is there any meaning to the journalist's code of truth, honesty, and integrity when he is in search of "the big story"? Are journalists a menace to the very social order that provides them with protection and sanctuary?

Certainly the time constraints on television news broadcasts set this form of reporting apart from print journalism. A television story is invariably headlines and subheadlines; the text is merely background accompaniment for a visual depiction. The average story is two minutes in length. "Pictures tell the story, not a talking head" is a well-established cliché in the industry. Those who prefer a bright talking head who tells a story well are informed by the cognoscenti: "That may be journalism, but it isn't television journalism."

Another condition of television news to which Lesher alludes but doesn't explore is "news provincialism." This is the phenomenon of "What happens to Americans is what's happening." Rare is the student who when asked the question, "What is the bloodiest war in the last three decades?" responds with any answer other than "Vietnam." The correct response is the war in the Sudan—an event that American television cameras did not cover and which, as a consequence, remains an event about which Americans are completely ignorant. Related to this matter is the way in which television cameras make the news. Posturing is a natural response to the camera. When the news crew arrives the target audience is "on stage," as was the case with Iranians holding American diplomats hostage or students holding a dean captive at the University of California. The news is often manufactured, an inauthentic event staged by authentic actors. Dan Rather is quoted by Lesher as suggesting television news is a "crude art." Yet Rather—like other reporters and anchors—projects an image of assuredness. He and his confreres couch their news items in sincere, straightforward reporting. But all too often what is seen can't be believed and what is said with assurance should be said with qualification. This is particularly evident in the case of *60 Minutes,* which Lesher details.

An examination of the contentious questioning style of Mike Wallace makes it quite obvious that queries made by "reporters" are structured to support a preconceived point of view. Although this is described as "advocacy journalism"

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(a contradiction in terms), it is another example of the search for truth through inauthentic means. Complexity is reduced to the editor's and producer's predilections. And to make matters worse, *60 Minutes'* producer Don Hewitt adopts the self-righteous stance that his is the "only" position. When confronted with several examples of omission and commission on his programs, Mr. Hewitt refused to apologize, maintaining that these were programs worth doing despite their flaws. In the egocentric world of Mr. Hewitt, the media interest is inextricably united with the national interest. Ultimately *he* decides what is good for the nation and nestles the entire process under the protective umbrella of the First Amendment. Libel and slander have become anachronisms in a television age that eagerly promotes the sensational and a philosophy of caveat emptor. Those who are hurt in the process are treated with as much concern as the videotape left on the cutting-room floor. Here are the new gods: lacking humility, searching for new muck to rake, posturing for audience approval, and administering extraordinary power without responsibility.

Admittedly, the public has "a right to know"—to employ another media cliché—but so too does the public have a right to expect tastefulness, good judgment, and fairness in those it has anointed as journalistic gods. If Walter Cronkite, to cite one of those who sat on the Olympus of Black Rock, can say after the 1968 Tet offensive "this government is losing the center over Vietnam" despite the now well-documented American victory at that time, hubris has replaced fairness as a godly attribute. Time and again Mr. Lesher, to his credit, identifies reporters who confuse their mission to present the news fairly with a deeply ingrained ideology that includes suspicion of government, dislike for business, and the usual panoply of liberal "virtues."

This brings back a point raised earlier: do distortions result from the nature of journalism or the nature of journalists? As I've suggested, there are intrinsic


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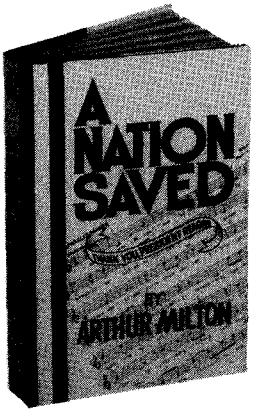


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problems in television news that are directly related to the medium. But there are also distortions that result from the training and background of television journalists. Their training at many universities and as apprentices at newspapers and television stations is an exercise in mimicking media heroes. If Mike Wallace is contentious, young journalists believe that is the appropriate style for an interviewer. How else can one explain the perverse distemper of Geraldo Rivera? His level of despair for social injury shows little distinction between an assassination attempt on the Pope and the decline of his favorite rock star's career. Almost every journalism student thinks of himself as a budding Woodward or Bernstein searching for his Deep Throat. Media stardom is what he aspires to, not the thankless and plodding job of unearthing the difficult facts that give a story its texture. Television news is in a constellation of shooting stars—as soon as you see it, the star is gone, a fleeting memory that neither lingers nor provides illumination.

In the United Kingdom the BBC has introduced the sensible policy of calling anchormen "readers." Why should American broadcast readers of the Associated Press printout be called anything else? By attributing undeserved status to the "news" people, deplorable distortions are promoted. Perhaps this explains why many viewers have lost perspective on contemporary events and why relatively trivial matters can be exaggerated into earth-shattering calamities. For instance, television newscasters sometimes equate Joseph McCarthy with Hitler. That an overzealous politician who employed questionable tactics can be compared to Hitler is not simply a distortion; it is a lie of such magnitude as to rewrite history. Similar exaggerations abounded with regard to Watergate. That debacle is no longer considered a stupid violation of political fair play or Presidential tampering with the political process; it is now seen as the Soviet Purge or Cromwell's Rump Parliament. If the populace were sophisticated about history, the absurdity of these claims would immediately be apparent. But that isn't the case. As a result, history is homogenized so that one evil is like another, distinctions lose focus, and even those things one should wish to preserve and defend lose meaning. Television news doesn't simply corrupt, it debases.

But exaggerating events is only one part of the television news calculus. Another significant dimension is its contamination of news. Last month's events are a vague memory; what happened last year is forgotten. A visual montage of blood and gore desensitizes us, leaving in its wake the erasure of history. If history courses were once criticized for their emphasis on names, dates, and places, they can now be criticized for leaving us with little but "feelings": students now "know" that Kennedy cared and Nixon didn't. It may not be the intent of news programming, but it has promoted historical amnesia. "Docudramas"—the halfway houses between the news and theater—admittedly take liberties with the facts. Such manipulation of the news itself is no longer considered the violation of a sacred trust, even when it is recognized. It simply appears as another kind of docudrama. In the final analysis—notwithstanding all the pompous claims—television news is more often than not an extension of entertainment programming. It is there for ratings; it titillates and excites. The weatherman is not a reporter; he entertains. The anchor isn't an interpreter or reader; he's a dreamboat. The interview isn't for gathering information; it is designed to intimidate a foe. Even the sports reporter doesn't simply give us scores; he is expected to be a comedian and clown.

Mr. Lesher has performed a valuable service in demonstrating where television news has gone wrong. But he is too charitable. Ultimately he contends that journalistic presentations aren't slanted because of ideology. They are based, he maintains, on misinformation. He is unconvincing. The impact of the Don Hewitts cannot be so lightly cast aside. Misinformation exists some of the time, but not all, or even nearly all, of the time. Producers like Hewitt aren't simply careless—they have an ax to grind. It is knowing what that ax is and how to combat it that might be useful to newsviewers. But since most viewers aren't aware of the producer's intent, news programs can be watched only with a sense of risk. □

# Effects of a Limited Imagination

**Jean Lacouture: *Léon Blum;* Holmes & Meier; New York.**

**by Richard A. Cooper**

Before every human being lies the burden and opportunity of choice. We must make choices and bear their consequences. Society is a vast web of interpersonal relations wherein individuals are affected by the choices of others and vice versa. The choices certain individuals make, the ideas which enter into those choices, and their results constitute the subject matter of history. Léon Blum, French premier in the late 1930's, wielded power that affected the lives of millions of people in the tumultuous first half of the 20th century. From Jean Lacouture's account, Blum emerges as a man whose critical choice was to champion what he construed as justice and the republican ideal. The means to his end: socialism.

Originally a man of letters, Blum faced the necessity of making a steady living. His choice is revealing. The young socialist, of impeccably bourgeois origins, made an impeccably bourgeois choice. "In January 1896, he thus became *auditeur* second class in the *Conseil d'Etat,* a

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member of the disputed claims section, with a salary of two thousand francs a month; coming one month before his marriage, the salary was enough to set up a household in untroubled comfort." Not the sort of biography one expects for a revolutionary, but then he was not one.

A momentous event transformed the life of Léon Blum from that of the literary figure he was to the politician he became. That event was the Dreyfus Affair, which rocked the Second Republic at the turn of the century. A friendship proved critical to Blum's course, that of Socialist leader Jean Jaures. United by the assaults of their enemies (the Anti-Dreyfusards were proponents of street actions against the Republic) and their similar moral tone, Blum became Jaures's lieutenant in the reformist, parliamentary wing of French socialism. Like their opponents, the Dreyfusards were principally concerned with the future of the nation; the struggle over the innocence or guilt of Alfred Dreyfus was the casus belli. For Blum, the "Antis" were the upholders of injustice and a threat to the Republic.

Lacouture shows, convincingly in my opinion, that Blum's "socialism" was an outgrowth of his passion for justice and his belief that it was the fulfillment of the revolution of 1789. His choice to champion justice and the Republic via the Socialist Party would determine his political career.

The word *socialism* with reference to Blum is put into quotation marks because Blum rendered an already nebulous term almost completely devoid of meaning. Although he could trot out Marx to carry the burden of argument with socialist ranks when occasion demanded, Blum's conception of socialism was strikingly religious, or perhaps better expressed as "sentimental" in the usage of Vilfredo Pareto *(The Mind & Society)*. On this point, Lacouture observes that "For neither Jaures nor Blum was socialism a science. . . . For both men, socialism was at once a culture, a morality and an art, the art of harmonizing, rationalizing society." Blum's speeches appealed to justice, not the realization of the pseudo-scientific laws of historical development propounded by Marx.

Marxism suffered a crisis of explanation toward the end of the 19th century when the eagerly expected revolution failed to materialize. In the terms of Thomas Kuhn, there was a breakdown of the paradigm which provided the opportunity for rival paradigms, albeit within Marxism. Thus developed the revisionism of Bernstein and Kautsky, as well as the syndicalism of Sorel and the Bolshevism of Lenin. Blum felt the uneasiness of the crisis of Marxism. Berkeley political scientist A. James Gregor *(The Fascist Persuasion in Radical Politics* and *Young Mussolini and the Intellectual Origins of Fascism)* interprets Mussolini's fascism as a Marxist heresy which sprang from the crisis of Marxism in order to champion "voluntarism" (as opposed to determinist historicism) and the affective power of appeals, including nationalist ones. Blum's approach can be interpreted similarly, discarding determinism in favor of appeals to justice and the ideas of 1789 (a convenient, ready-made Sorelian "myth"). While not going over to the nationalist camp as Mussolini would do, this meant that Blum and his cohorts could bask in patriotic glory, helpful with an electorate schooled in the mystique of the nation.

Blum's economics differentiate him from contemporary Socialists. He considered planning to be inherently totalitarian, in tones reminiscent of *The Road to Serfdom.* Moreover, like Djilas or Trotsky, the Stalinists were creating a "new class" that, in his eyes, was inimical to freedom and democracy. Nationalizations of French industry under Blum were primarily of the transport and "public utility" sort that most European states had always reserved for themselves. It was de Gaulle who imposed indicative planning on France. Lacouture brings to light the interesting revelation that, influenced by Jacques Rueff, Blum was committed to the defense of the gold standard.

Lacouture defends Blum against charges that a historic chance to seize power for the working class was betrayed by his government. Communist leader Maurice Thorez termed the Popular Front a contract between the middle class and the working class. Unlike Mitterrand's government, the Popular Front was a parliamentary working majority of

## In the Mail

***Liar's Manual* by Roland Baker; Nelson-Hall; Chicago.** This book promotes lying. And that's the truth.

***The War Powers Resolution: Its Implementation in Theory and Practice* by Robert F. Turner; Foreign Policy Research Institute; Philadelphia.** As is well known, too many cooks spoil the soup. The War Powers Resolution, which puts everyone in the kitchen, has, the author argues, made a hash of diplomacy.

***International Debt: Crisis and Challenge* by Robert E. Weintraub; George Mason University; Fairfax, VA.** The questions involved with U.S. banks "lending" to Eastern bloc and lesser developed countries (LDC's) are examined in this brief but thorough study.

***Private Rights & Public Lands* edited by Phillip N. Truluck; The Heritage Foundation; Washington, DC.** A line for Watt-baiters: "A growing number of environmental economists, legal scholars, and other experts have concluded the public bureaucracies overseeing federal and state lands have been primarily responsible for the myriad economic and environmental problems which have developed." "For Sale" signs, anyone?

***Renascence,* Vol. XXXV, No. 3, edited by Joseph Schwartz; Marquette University Press; Milwaukee.** Literary essays with a difference: a Christian perspective.



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Socialists, Communists, and the middle-class Radicals. The Communists remained aloof from the government, while the Radicals were notoriously opportunistic.

Blum's most important decision during the Popular Front government was to remain neutral during the Spanish Civil War, an action which sealed the fate of the Spanish Republic. Why did he choose this course? Lacouture suggests that Blum, an ardent Anglophile, was swayed by the British Tory government's opposition to aid for the Republic. However, it seems that the palpable threat of civil war in France itself necessarily restrained Blum. Blum regarded the uprising as a blow against his own Popular Front. The International Brigades who fought for the Loyalists are remembered today, but many Frenchmen fought for the Nationalists. The right and segments of the army were openly supportive of the rebels, which must chasten a government bordered by the two principal allies of the Nationalists, nazi Germany and fascist Italy. Blum's policy was strange: challenging Russia, Germany, and Italy to join his noninterventionist stand while covertly providing token amounts of aid to the Republicans.

Was Blum's choice of socialism necessary? Could he have maintained his ideals with another vehicle? The domain of choice was not wide. The right was openly anti-Semitic, hostile to the Republic, and quite prone to violence (both assassination and street mobs). As for the bourgeois parties, they were exemplars of opportunist parliamentary politics and tainted by corruption, such as the Panama Scandal and the Stavisky Affair. Blum and Lacouture take for granted that socialism is just.

Many readers will undoubtedly approach this book with hopes that it will allow them to predict the actions of the Mitterrand government. They will be disappointed. Mitterrand is not Léon Blum, and the world of today is radically different from that of 1936. The Communists did not participate in the Popular Front cabinet, and the balance of support between the two parties was far more equal in 1936. France at that time was in the depths of depression and had very real external and internal threats to its security. Moreover, thanks to de Gaulle, Mitterrand as president has powers not dreamed of by Blum as premier. Léon Blum sought to do right by his nation and the world. He can be faulted for the lack of imagination that restricted his choice to socialism, but his devotion to justice itself was not a failing. □

# Ties that Strangle

**Stanley Rothman and S. Robert Lichter: *Roots of Radicalism: Jews, Christians, and the New Left;* Oxford University Press; New York.**

**by J. David Hoeveler, Jr.**

Secularity, it's often stated, is the governing norm of life in these late-20th-century times. The refrain rings so familiar that we take note when we hear that, for some explanations of human behavior, religion counts. Here we have the most exhaustive and detailed study of a movement of the recent past and more than halfway through it the authors pause to explain what they have made clear already: the most important key to the radical personality types that constituted the American New Left of the 1960's is religious background. But ours are confusing times. Stanley Rothman and Robert Lichter feel safer referring to Jewish and other groups as "ethnic" rather than "religious" categories. And well they might, for the central focus of their study is the radical, thoroughly secularized Jew. Born to a family whose religion survives as no more than distant memories of immigrant grandparents and their ghetto culture, these children inherited a family pattern thoroughly cosmopolitan in outlook and modernist in style. If there was a religion to rebel against, it was but a ghost. So the drama here does not follow the familiar script of a generation gap and its attending hostilities. The Jewish rebel moved toward the same liberal and radical extremes of the parental model.

*Roots of Radicalism* is essentially a contribution to psychology. Based on extensive questionnaires sent to more than 1100 students at four American universities and amplified by in-depth analyses of a more select group, the study attempts to draw personality portraits of conservative, liberal, and radical students. The authors provide a critique of the studies that preceded theirs; they find serious weaknesses in all of them, most often the investigators' biases in favor of the New Left. Rothman and Lichter avoid appealing to any mode of psychological determinism in accounting for the emergence of the New Left in the 1960's. That phenomenon sprang from coincidental causes that provided a unique historical occasion to vent inner dilemmas and hidden rage. The authors believe, too, that psychological factors governed the larger shape of the radical movement, which sprang from a heavily Jewish domination in the early years, one continuous with a European and American tradition, and moved to a non-Jewish domination much more violent in character.

The Jewish presence in Western radicalism emerged with its escape from the European ghetto. The Enlightenment and its militant expression in Napoleon dismantled the structure of feudalism and seemed to promise to assimilate all peoples into the modern state. Reform Jews embraced these causes, but an even more religiously deracinated group carried their zealousness into revolution, socialist idealism, and Marxism. This tradition of dissent, by the early decades of the 20th century, received a more formalized academic expression in the writ-

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ings of the Frankfurt School in Germany. The exile of Theodor Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, and Erich Fromm in the United States symbolized the modernization of American radicalism as well, for here was a new literature for the making of a nascent counterculture. But Rothman and Lichter also insist that American Jews had already contributed heavily to an adversary culture in this country. They made up a quarter of the rank-and-file membership of the Communist Party in the 1920's, even more of it in the 30's. Also, as academics at influential universities, as literary and social commentators for *Partisan Review* and the *New York Review of Books,* as powerful shapers of the television medium (estimated 58% of television news producers and editors, according to the authors), Jews prepared the way for the discrediting of the traditionalist America. They triumphed in "radical chic" New York, but they would gain in Peoria, too.

The authors of *Roots of Radicalism* accept the concept of marginality as the most useful explanation for the Jewish radical stance. Liberation from the ghetto by no means meant full assimilation into the other society. Existing in that society and outside of it, the Jew who senses this tension seeks also its resolution. Hence the appeal of Marxism. That ideology furnishes the means of transcending the Christian-Jewish schism by shifting the locus of struggle into the arena of class warfare; the shift, of course, essentially invalidates the ethnic division. But another motivation prevails also: "The aim of the Jewish radical," say Rothman and Lichter, "is to estrange the Christian from society as he feels estranged from it." So the whole society itself must be exposed for the evil it is, and a literature of renunciation, attack, and vilification clears the path for revolution.

The modern literature of revolution bears another theme, that of the authoritarian personality, a contribution of the Frankfurt group especially. The classic authoritarian is a conservative, or, in an extreme form, a fascist. He defends himself against his underlying conflicts and insecurity by turning his hidden hostilities onto outsiders and out-groups, attributing to them the source of his failures and the vulnerability of his world. Rothman and Lichter, however, explore in a very suggestive way an opposing model, the "inverse authoritarian," as a more appropriate description of the American

New Left radical. It is a model, moreover, that they find especially appropriate for the non-Jewish radical. The inverse authoritarian unleashes his anger against the powers that be while taking an affectionate and partisan stance with the victims and out-groups of the dominant society. But the dilemma for the inverse authoritarian is never easily resolved; it is rooted in ambiguous attitudes toward power and in attending Oedipal complexes that defy easy reconciliation. The authoritarian personality of this kind, combating both masochistic and sadistic tendencies, believes he deserves punishment for his evil desires, including the desire for power. He may reconcile these tensions by losing himself in a greater power, especially one charged by a charismatic leader. He submits to the will of the leader, but gains superiority over others by involvement with the group.

The manifestation of these characteristics assumes a marked political form at those critical times when the establishment is under attack and appears weakened. Rothman and Lichter emphasize the Oedipal factor at this point. "The rigid rebel acts out [his] hostility against social authorities that function, in part, as parental surrogates. He seeks to attack and destroy a weakened establishment, which he despises precisely for its weakness and lack of 'toughness.'" He would replace this "paper tiger" by a new political hierarchy, of which an authoritarian socialist regime is the ideal type. This individual is always susceptible to the appeal of perceived strength. His attitude toward leaders like Fidel Castro is worshipful; he finds in Third World peoples a hardiness and vigor that he contrasts to the effete decadence of overstuffed capitalist societies. And ultimately he may not be able to resist violence itself against the surfeited enemy. The authors make use of these personality types in their review of the leftist movement. The days of Berkeley protest and the early SDS established the heavily Jewish origins of the New Left, while the other group gave it its later, more violent, character.

That distinctions within the leftist movement can be made on ethnic-religious grounds is a fact that Rothman and Lichter demonstrate quite persuasively. I wonder whether they might have gone even further in this direction. For although the authors make a few references to the "Portnoy syndrome" of Jewish self-hatred, this trait appears distinctive in character and manifestation from the recurring feelings of guilt that they find among the non-Jewish radicals. They find also among this group both a marked quality of "revolutionary asceticism" and the compulsion for a kind of inner remaking of the personality. It would be instructive, I believe, to study further whether these manifestations are not, to some extent, the products of a traditional Protestant culture and the personality traits that have survived in a secular manner from that religious tradition. Rothman and Lichter find that the inverse authoritarian is "tormented by residual masochism stemming from his punitive super-ego." He has an inner sense of evil and can only alleviate a feeling that he should surrender to authority and submit obediently by giving himself up to a superior power and by imposing on himself a rigid pattern of self-control. "He must," the authors say, "create a 'new man' within himself by an act of self-will and self-control." The need



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for such inner rebirth and for the conviction of "salvation" could be no more poignantly fulfilled than as victim of the Establishment's cruelty, in short, by the policeman's club. The believer now secures an identity rooted in self-sacrifice and moral righteousness. The puritan's quest has been fulfilled; "I bleed therefore I am."

Rothman and Lichter provide a thought-provoking study. Their material is thorough to the point of being overladen with information and indigestible statistical analyses. But it is painstakingly lucid and jargon-free. A reader has many occasions for reflection and self-analysis as personality traits, parental relations, phobias, and fantasies pass under review in a long procession. Who could not, at many points along the way, see bits of his own reflection? And though the authors have succeeded in giving us several portraits of the radical left in the United States, one must still ask just what they have proved. With how much accuracy could we prognostigate that, should this country undergo another hemorrhage, it would be non-Jewish students who had punitive fathers and registered 4.38 in the confabulation segment of the pathology category of the Rorschach tests who would man the barricades in the next revolution?

I suspect that many conservatives will find *Roots of Radicalism* comforting. How reassuring it might be to dismiss free-speech movements, civil-rights marches, and antiwar protests as merely the manifestation of all those Oedipal complexes. But we might do well to remember with what facile joy liberals received *The Authoritarian Personality,* prepared by Adorno in 1950, and *The New American Right,* to which Richard Hofstadter, Daniel Bell, David Reisman, and others contributed in 1955. Conservative thinkers, they argued, were frustrated, maladjusted, status-conscious, suspicious, and insecure; their ideas revealed little about the real world, but much about the troubled souls from which they came. The conservative intellectual did not belong in the classroom; his place was on the couch. William F. Buckley, Jr. and Frank Meyer renounced those claims with justifiable wrath. But even as we recall the days of rage, these incidents should give us pause. □

# Politics Pure-Hearted and Punk

***Ronald Reagan Talks to America;* Introduction by Richard M. Scaife; Devin-Adair; Old Greenwich, CT.**

**Phillip Finch: *God, Guts, and Guns: A Close Look at the Radical Right;* Seaview/Putnam; New York.**

**by Jeffrey St. John**

Sincerity in American politics can be charming. It can also be deceptive and dangerous. Great evils have grown out of sincere actions that have fragile factual foundations and which lack a tough, animated intelligence. Both of these books suffer from the sins of sincerity. Each provides a clue as to why the politics of the right and the left in America has become the breeding ground for frustration and failure.

*Ronald Reagan Talks to America* is a collection of speeches from the Goldwater Republican National Convention in 1964 to the December 1981 speech of President Reagan denouncing the imposition of martial law in Poland. Richard Mellon Scaife's introduction argues that Mr. Reagan's 1980 election represented a potential "new consensus for the nation" with a change from dominant liberalism to conservatism. "It is too early to tell," he states, "whether or not this new and in many ways still fragile consensus has actually triggered a long-term change in the nation's direction. But the signals are there, for those who choose to see them, that a watershed has been reached. The United States will either return to greater levels of individual sovereignty or continue down 'The Road to Serfdom.'"

As comforting as the Reagan rhetoric may seem, the reality of foreign and domestic policy will determine whether such a consensus becomes permanent or perishes. The American electorate repudiated Presidents Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter because they failed to achieve results and make good on what they had promised. Mr. Reagan faces the same political peril. "Make no mistake," President Reagan told a nationwide TV audience on December 21, 1981, after martial law was imposed on Poland, "their crime will cost them dearly in future dealings with America and free peoples everywhere. I do not make this statement lightly or without serious reflection." It does nothing to diminish Mr. Reagan's sincerity and integrity of intent to point out that his Administration paid the interest on Warsaw's swollen foreign debt. In doing so, sincere intent was incinerated by pragmatic policy. It was pragmatism for 20 years that fueled a foolish policy of Western loans and U.S. favored-nation trade treatment for an Eastern European Stalinist-command economy in the belief that by subsidizing socialism, the West could woo the Warsaw dictatorship. The Polish crisis confirms what the "Father of American Pragmatism," William James, concluded at the end of his life: pragmatism is not very practical.

A similar gulf between Reagan rhetoric and policy reality presents itself in domestic matters. Having promised a program of deregulation, abolition of the Departments of Energy and Education, and a reduction in taxes, he has achieved little in these areas, or others, and has even implemented policy contrary to conviction and promise. The root origins and the peril they pose to the Reagan Presidency might be better understood by relating two illuminating professional and personal incidents of this writer.

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I first met and interviewed Ronald Reagan in late August 1974 at the Washington-Baltimore Friendship International Airport motel. During the 45-minute on-camera interview, I asked Mr. Reagan whether, in the wake of Mr. Nixon's Watergate-related resignation, Mr. Ford had consulted him on the selection of Nelson Rockefeller as Vice-President. Candidly, he said no. Could not such a lack of consultation with the most important leader of the conservative wing of the GOP indicate that the liberal wing of the Republican Party was out to cut his throat in August 1974 and to deny him the nomination in 1976? Genuinely surprised by the question, Reagan expressed the belief that he did not think his "friends" Ford and Rockefeller would do such a thing. We now know this is exactly what happened in 1976. Pressed repeatedly on the point, Mr. Reagan became nervous and uncharacteristically evasive. He was saved by the harmless explosion of a TV light that terminated the interview. I realized that what had been said about Reagan was true; he has the luck of the Irish. Another comment is fitting in this context. As Lyndon B. Johnson once said: "If you walk into a room and you don't know who is for you and who is agin you, you're in the wrong line of work."

The Reagan debacle of 1976 illustrated this perfectly. John Sears, whom Mr. Reagan had chosen to run his presidential campaign, made all of the wrong political decisions. The country got Carter-Mondale as a consequence after an inept political campaign waged by the Ford and Dole pragmatists. Despite Sears's demonstrated incompetence, Ronald Reagan set off a political storm by making it known that Sears would run his 1980 presidential campaign. In August 1978 a luncheon attended by 100 conservative leaders was held on Capitol Hill to try to still the storm. Everyone at the luncheon wanted to ask Reagan about Sears. As one of the few members of the news media present, I rose and bluntly put the question of Sears to Reagan: "How can you justify retaining such a political turkey?" Reagan became flushed and defensive, insisting that it was unfair to characterize "my friend" in such terms. He had full confidence that Sears would do an outstanding job in the 1980 campaign. I replied that Sears raised a fundamental question that had haunted his two terms as Governor of California: a staff seeming to act contrary to his stated principles and policy. Hours before the 1980 New Hampshire primary Ronald Reagan was forced to fire John Sears to save his presi-


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dential campaign from collapse.

Since Mr. Reagan was sworn in as President he has been plagued with the same problem. Perhaps what is even worse, the Reagan Administration at the highest level has been staffed by men and women who have spent most of their careers opposing his political principles and program. President Reagan's style of governing, moreover, has been to give these appointees wide latitude to act on his behalf. Such a loose style of Presidential leadership has had the effect of surrendering a fundamental weapon in the Washington war.

When Mr. Reagan was elected in November 1980 he faced three institutions with vested political interest in the failure of his principles and program: a liberal-dominated Congress, the bureaucracy, and the national news media. Yet, a majority of the men and women appointed for the purpose of carrying out his principles and program, given the latitude to do so, are by temperament, intellect, and background ill suited to wage the kind of sophisticated political warfare required to secure adoption of Mr. Reagan's program. In general, most of Mr. Reagan's appointees have been Nixon-Ford veterans, schooled in the policies of pragmatism and accommodation against a formidable opposition that has never known the meaning of the words. The result: a squandering of precious political capital during the Reagan Administration's first term. Mr. Reagan, pulled between the poles of accommodation and confrontation, has also produced a climate of stalemate and a failure to realize the program he has advanced since 1964.

This is the political tragedy of the Reagan Revolution, perceived by neither foe, nor friend, nor the President. At its root, the failure of the Reagan Administration is a failure of the President himself to judge the character and capacity of those he has chosen to serve him. His integrity of intent and sincerity are unimpeachable. Still, the rude reality remains that he faces the same danger which made Johnson, Nixon, Ford, and Carter one-term Presidents: the gulf between promise and performance.

A darker and distorted perception of Ronald Reagan is represented in Phillip Finch's *God, Guts, and Guns*, which presents itself as an analysis of the radical right, perceived by Finch to be groups ranging from the Moral Majority to the John Birch Society to the Ku Klux Klan and the American nazis. "Now they may be more important," Finch insists of such groups, "than they have been for decades. Those fringies on the right, without anybody noticing, have helped in their fractious and belligerent way to put Ronald Reagan in the White House." Such seemingly irresponsible statements emanate from someone who describes himself as a 33-year-old Roman Catholic "bleeding heart liberal" who is the son of an "old-line blue-collar union man." It is probably the latter association that saves Finch from becoming totally divorced from reality. *God, Guts, and Guns* is a sincere but hopelessly confused effort to find out what makes the radical right run. For example, on one hand, Finch, after a year of personal interviews with members of the radical right, concludes that they have little influence. At the end of the work, he claims that their extremist solutions might be accepted should the country be confronted with a crisis at home or abroad. "So the danger does exist," Finch warns, "there is always a risk in freedom. We could purge ourselves of the extremists if we really wanted. But in doing so we would wound our liberties and ourselves more grievously than the Radical Right ever could."

Finch never makes clear just how and why the radical right has wounded "our liberties." Amid all the liberal smugness, distortion, and confused state of mind, Finch tells us more about himself and the degree to which he has become the victim of his own political indoctrination. What makes this book interesting is that it provides a useful representative example of the younger generation of liberals who have come to believe that the straw men and scarecrows as represented in this work are objective reality.

Finch sincerely believes that what he has written and set forth is a valid analysis rather than the grotesque flight from reality and work of political pornography that it is. The Christian New Right, for example, is lumped together in roughly three pages with the Ku Klux Klan and the nazis. Finch does not even use the term "New Right," insisting that Jerry Falwell and the Moral Majority are somehow representative of the radical right. One puts down Finch's work in despair, mindful of Max Eastman's observation: "The great enemy of human hope is not brute facts, but men of brains who will not face them."

Perhaps this best summarizes the state of American political life from right to left. Politics has rarely been governed by objectivity or guided by evidence and experience. Politicians rarely bother to consult history and the lessons it has to impart. But what makes today's state of American politics so depressing and at the same time dangerous is that sincerity has become an excuse for escaping the consequences of one's actions. Sincerity has also become a convenient escape for those hungry for power over our lives and liberties. By their sincerity they escape accountability for past folly, foolishness, and disasters. Such a state of affairs is unique in our history. It raises the question of whether a highly complex and developed civilization can remain both free and productive if the political leadership, which exercises such far-reaching control over its future, refuses to be governed by evidence and experience, and, at the same time, escapes accountability by a retreat into professions of sincerity when it is wrong. □

"Finch has a sharp eye . . . . his descriptions are . . . fair, on target. . . . These right-wingers are probably more dangerous to one another than to anyone outside their orbit."
—*Harper's*



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COMMENDABLES

# Ideology and Culture

**Lee Congdon: *The Young Lukács;*** University of North Carolina Press; Chapel Hill.

Georg Lukács (1885-1981), the Hungarian Marxist critic and philosopher, is not one of our favorite people. His was a skillful, powerful mind; his influence was great, pernicious. A common approach taken by some in conservative circles is to excoriate Lukács and others of his genus with a string of abusive epithets. Certainly no quarter should be given, but such tactics ultimately fail. After all, Lukács and his methodology have been embraced by many at American institutions such as Yale; a number of the man's books carry the imprint of the M.I.T. Press; and, as Lee Congdon points out in his detailed account of Lukács's intellectual development, Lukács's *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* is "the single most influential Marxist work of the twentieth century." Simple sneering rejection essentially bespeaks an inability to come to terms with the ideas, as if Lukács is unassailable. Young people who are trying to strengthen themselves intellectually might be—probably would be—inclined to follow Lukács and his epigones, who would appear more appealing than those brandishing brickbats. Battle with minds like Lukács's must take place at the intellectual level. This may seem like a rather banal observation, but it is one that is rarely considered.

Congdon does a number of fine things in this book. For example, he structures his text around some of the women in Lukács's life and thus shows the importance of interpersonal relationships to the formation of ideas: thinkers are not simply ruled by the functions of synapses in their brains; if that were so, then we might as well turn to a Cray computer as the oracle of knowledge.

One passage written by Congdon can be used to show that the purpose of *Chronicles of Culture* is, indeed, a vital one. That is, whereas many of our brethren mount the barricades brandishing socioeconomic theories and political campaign placards, we happen to think that such gestures are little more than holding actions, that the real key is what Marx and his followers dismissed as the "superstructure": what people read, watch, listen to. These things are ultimately of more importance to the state of civilized society than whether the people in that society invest the gain from tax cuts or whom they vote for. The passage written by Congdon is in reference to Dostoevski's novels, which had a signal effect on Lukács when he was in his early 30's. About Alyosha Karamazov, Prince Myshkin, and Sonia, Congdon remarks, "It was his misunderstanding of these famous characters that led Lukács from Christianity to heresy and from Christian love to hatred of his fellowmen." Lukács wasn't born a Marxist. While he did read philosophy, he also turned to novels. Fiction, as Congdon explains, had a profound effect on Lukács's Weltanschauung. By examining products of culture—novels, films, periodicals, TV presentations—one can come to a better understanding of the seedbeds of new ideas. Thus *Chronicles.*

Certainly there are others who examine the same objects. With regard to the arts, however, a preponderant number of the examiners tend to be liberal. They tout the books and films that legitimatize themselves; they prevent the promulgation of contrary presentations, and should some slip through the net, then they are defeated with silence. However, damage is also done by some groups that espouse conservative formulations. Remember, Dostoevski's Sonia was a whore: assuming that some modern Dostoevski were to emerge, one wonders if his books wouldn't be promptly consigned to the flames by some well-intentioned guardians.

As Shakespeare wrote in *Coriolanus,* "One fire drives out one fire; one nail, one nail." Our ideological foes have long taken culture seriously. Unless more of our comrades (a good word that shouldn't be given up without a fight) do the same, then the seedbeds from which other young Lukácses will spring will continue to be ladened with manure from New York publishing houses, Hollywood screening rooms, and TV networks' headquarters. □

# Walk, Don't Run

**Stanislaw Lem: *His Master's Voice;*** Harcourt Brace Jovanovich; San Diego.

In the early 1730's Alexander Pope observed that "The proper study of mankind is Man." Pope wrote those words when the Royal Society was some 70 years old, when man was challenging (he thought) God and Nature with the scientific methodologies that he *knew* would make him be one like a god. In 1855 Robert Browning wrote, "Ah, but a man's reach should exceed his grasp,/Or what's a heaven for?" Browning is today more heeded than Pope. Those who in Pope's day thought that they could become masters of the world now envision the possibility of becoming masters of the universe—not through physical domination, but through understanding. On 13 June 1983 the first man-made object ever to do so, Pioneer 10, left our solar system. In addition to scientific equipment, Pioneer 10 carries a 6″ x 9″ gold-anodized aluminum plaque. The plaque has a number of illustrations engraved on it, including a man and a woman, Earth's position in this solar system, the solar system's position in relation to 14 pulsars, and a measuring scale based on hydrogen atoms.

Later, Voyager spacecrafts will zoom or whoosh or otherwise go out of this solar system. Wrote Carl Sagan in *Murmurs of Earth* (Random House: New York, 1978), "Each Voyager spacecraft has a golden phonograph record. . . . Instructions for playing the record, written in scientific language, are etched on the [record's] cover. A cartridge and a stylus, illustrated on the cover, are tucked into the spacecraft nearby." Assuming that the flying jukebox is waylaid and that the instructions are followed (though one



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wonders: "scientific language" is not universal), then Whatever will be treated to music ranging from Solomon Islands panpipes to Louis Armstrong's horn, a message from Jimmy Carter and one from whales, 118 pictures of life on Earth, and more. Eight of the pictures (all of the data are digitized, of course) are of particular interest. They are of the human anatomy; they are taken from encyclopedia overlays. As such, they are peppered with numerals that refer to a key. The scientists putting together the package didn't have time to delete the numerals. The key (e.g., "1. The heart") is missing. What will the Whatevers make of such oddly formed beings?

Stanislaw Lem, in a book written five years before Pioneer 10 blasted off (i.e., 1967), reversed the situation. In *His Master's Voice* Lem posits that humans who are monitoring the galaxy pick up a stream of subatomic particles that, when processed through a computer, seem to indicate that there is a message there. So the American government establishes a gargantuan scientific team. The objective: to crack the code. Lem convincingly shows that the physicists, astronomers, linguists, biologists, sociologists, mathematicians, and various other scientists are, ultimately, at a loss to "explain" the message—they can't even prove that it *is* a message. It becomes painfully obvious that man need not go grasping about for faraway heavens as what he knows about himself is so limited that even a slightly better grip on what he *is* would in itself be a remarkable accomplishment, truly a giant step for mankind. □

## Light in Dark Places

**James Hitchcock: *What Is Secular Humanism? Why Humanism Became Secular and How It Is Changing Our World;*** Servant Books; Ann Arbor, MI.

Obscurantism is a charge often leveled against religionists by unbelievers. With respect to some past ecclesiastical actions, such as the persecution of Galileo, such an indictment may seem warranted. In the late 20th century, however, those most guilty of protecting their cosmic views by deliberately shrouding them in impenetrable mystery are not the orthodox faithful but rather those enemies of religion who typically refer to themselves as "enlightened" and "rational." Indeed, as these adherents to a distinctively anthropocentric and terrestrial gospel proselytize in the schools, courts, and even churches, they slyly feign a posture of open-minded neutrality. Those who see through this pose and do not share their doctrinal preconvictions accurately designate their philosophy "secular humanism." But because the national media are dominated by those engaged in the covert war against religion, they dismiss this label as nonsensical, applicable nowhere but in the nightmares of neurotic believers. Readers of James Hitchcock's *What Is Secular Humanism?* must conclude, despite the media smoke screen, that secular humanism is as real as the sunspots Galileo discovered with his telescope, and far more threatening.

Dr. Hitchcock's work, written for an intelligent layman, illuminates with an impressive breadth of scholarship and a penetrating rigor of analysis how various historical forces coalesced in this alluring but destructive contemporary "ism." Preaching against God and eternity, secular humanists urge men to find fulfillment on earth by placing their ultimate

trust in temporal man. The dangers of this are twofold. If this trust is equally applicable to all men, moral anarchy ensues. "Liberated" from every standard of truth larger than the individual ego, society, family, and community disintegrate into millions of appetite-ridden selves, subhuman beasts enslaved by pornography, drugs, and amorphous sex. On the other hand, any secularist attempt to secure social order by focusing faith on a single man or party of men must be as arbitrary as Carlyle's hero-worship, since no supramundane values can be permitted to adjudicate between, say, a Machiavellian leader and a Jeffersonian one. Totalitarianism is the likely result.

Apparently determined to impale America on both horns of this dilemma, many unelected government bureaucrats and Federal judges—encouraged by pop psychologists, mass entertainers, trendy intellectuals, and liberal theologians—have sought over the last 25 years to expand the power both of the state and of selected groups of amoral individuals at the expense of religion. Thus Marxists, atheists, and hedonists may evangelize in state schools and libraries, but orthodox Christian and Jews must be kept under house arrest. Scripture and devotion are locked in the closet, even as homosexuals are invited out. The crime and social instability fostered by such a strategy do not seem to disturb its champions, nor do its logical inconsistencies. What would greatly disturb them is the wide circulation of books like Dr. Hitchcock's compelling but judiciously restrained and even-handed study. The shapers of prevailing culture prefer that their antireligious prejudice be hidden in the fogs of public ignorance, not outlined in the glare of Dr. Hitchcock's incisive scrutiny. That is probably why this superb little book is offered not by a major publishing house in New York, but rather by a small concern in Ann Arbor. Nevertheless, as a Christian Dr. Hitchcock must know that eventually even truths whispered in secret will be shouted from the housetops. (BC) □

## Laying Siege to the Castle

**Richard Helgerson: *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System;*** University of California Press; Berkeley.

Achieving literary fame, prominence, or even notice isn't easy. It never has been. In the modern world, numerous people are vying for ranking. One of the consequences of increased leisure time and government transfer payments is a proliferation of manuscripts. One of the consequences of an increase in disposable income is a wider assortment of salable options, including numerous publications. Given these two consequences—more written manuscripts and more published manuscripts—it would seem that talent would out: it would become evident who is good, mediocre, lousy. But that isn't so, and not simply because individuals are "accidentally overlooked" due to the acres of print. After all, there is a cadre employed by publishing houses, journals, magazines, newspapers, etc. Its charge is to read available



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materials and then to disseminate information about what they have read through the appropriate channels. Therefore, it is unlikely that great writers "just happen" to slip through the net. Chance undoubtedly does have an effect, but ideology is of more import. That is, if a writer of literature presents a world view that is contrary or in some way at odds to the one that is held by those in power, it is unlikely to be aired. This situation is more evident in the U.S.S.R. than it is in the U.S. because of the obvious, mechanical nature of the censoring apparatus in the former. However, the censoring instrument in the U.S. is more insidious as it is veiled under the cloak of the "free press." As has been pointed out numerous times in these pages, the liberal domination of the channels of communication has led to a state wherein there is a serious lack of balance. The messages that the liberals wish to see proliferated are widely touted; opposing or even alternate messages are either not expressed (i.e., not published) or simply bowled over by the sheer mass (i.e., not quality) of the reigning view.

One of the charges leveled against conservative interpretations of literature is that they tend to be consistently negative. There are two reasons for this to be the general case. First of all, there is the obvious one: the writers who are extensively hailed are actually quite bad *if* the standards that have existed since the time of Aristotle (which have been, of course, modified through the ages) are applied. To put it bluntly: conservative critics are more likely to call a spade a spade; as they are already outcasts, they have nothing to lose by being honest. (A caveat: watch out for the so-called "conservative critics" who do have something to lose—a table at Elaine's, an entrée to "chic" circles—as they are more likely to bow to fashion while pretending not to.) Second, they tend to be negative because there is little to praise. This is the case because conservative writers—or would-be writers—are often daunted by the seemingly inexorable opposing powers that be: the writers become frustrated at having their manuscripts bounced back from New York. Writing advertising copy becomes a more fulfilling thing to do, as that copy has a better chance of seeing ink.

In a sense, *Self-Crowned Laureates* is a book that should be carefully examined by conservative writers. Helgerson styles it a "semiotic study" and makes the appropriate references to Foucault, Benveniste, Culler, and others. This might put a number of readers off. It shouldn't, as it is almost as if semiotics, which is currently fashionable, was seized simply because of its salability: Helgerson uses it, but except for in isolated cases, it isn't at all overbearing. The book is an examination of several poets of the late 16th and early 17th centuries,

Spenser, Jonson, and Milton, in particular. Certainly, this is a rather scholarly topic, and, indeed, the book is scholarly in nature. However, Helgerson's argument is interesting; more importantly, it is applicable outside of the classroom. Spenser, Jonson, and Milton each wanted to make his mark on the "literary system," to establish himself as the outstanding author of his day, as the laureate. The problem that Spenser faced (and the others to a lesser degree, as they followed him) is one not unlike that faced by a conservative writer of today. Poets in Spenser's day were not taken seriously; one was not a professional poet, or even a full-time poet, as poetry was simply a hobby inspired by the hot blood of youth. For example, Helgerson points out that Sidney, who is now considered a father of English poetry, "allowed none of his literary productions to be printed and referred to the *Arcadia*, the most ambitious of his undertakings, as his 'toyful book' to be read by his sister and her friends 'at your idle times.'" Poetry for Sidney and others was like an adolescent complexion problem: something that one got over in a fairly short period of time. "Self-presentation" in this literary milieu, the strategies involved in breaking down the prejudice mounted by the powerful, are described by Helgerson. Although all three of the detailed authors suffered lapses during their struggles, it is clear that they tenaciously stuck to their beliefs in themselves and in what they were doing. Such application and strength of conviction is necessary, required, today. □

## Out of Sight . . .

***The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs;* Edited by J. A. Simpson;** Oxford University Press; New York.

An oral culture, as Walter J. Ong notes in *Orality and Literacy* (Methuen: New York, 1982), is hard for moderns even to imagine, accustomed as we are to words on pages, screens, packages, billboards, etc. Still, it wasn't so long ago that people were unable even to jot things down. Ong points out that the best thing that one can do to remember something in an oral culture is to "think memorable thoughts." Proverbs are such thoughts. This dictionary includes a large number of the common proverbs in use in Britain in the 20th century (America to a lesser extent). If nothing else, the valuable book, through the assortment found within it, shows how dependent we now are on print for the preservation of ideas. □

## In Focus

## Making Cents

***The Political Economy of Growth;* Edited by Dennis C. Mueller;** Yale University Press; New Haven, CT.

**by David Ryder Sands**

Perhaps economics has become known as the dismal science because so many economists have written on dismal and trivial subjects in impenetrable prose. *The Political Economy of Growth* is unlike the norm, and so for that reason alone it is to be welcomed. The book is an interesting and thoughtful exhibition of the discipline of political economy, the study of how economics is changed when human beings, as opposed to disembodied appetites, are the focus of interest.

The heart of *The Political Economy of Growth* is a clear, well-written essay by University

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of Maryland Professor Mancur Olson. In it, Olson addresses a key riddle of modern macroeconomic study: Why and how do nations grow? Why, furthermore, does one nation outstrip another or grow faster in one age than in another? Olson puts forth what is essentially a more pessimistic economic restatement of Madison's famous tenth *Federalist* essay. In modern democratic industrialized societies, special-interest organizations—in Madison's phrase, factions—naturally arise. These interest groups—labor unions, professional societies, manufacturing lobbies and cartels—have goals that are largely inconsistent with sound, healthy economic expansion. Each group can protect the gains it has won for its members only by restricting the entry of domestic and foreign competitors and by inhibiting those upsetting factors that make an economy flexible, dynamic, and resourceful. In Olson's words, "institutional sclerosis" sets in, and the country stagnates.

Olson is careful to say that he is not putting forward a "monocausal" explanation for why economies wax and wane. He also gives generous credit to the catch-up model, in which a country with large potential for growth—South Korea or the defeated Axis powers—will generally grow faster than those which have already industrialized—Great Britain or the United States. Perhaps the most startling corollary of Olson's thesis is that extended political stability and liberalism are precisely the correct ingredients for creating a social atmosphere in which sclerosis-inducing groups can flourish. Great Britain has been largely hurt by the solidity of its institutions and the generally temperate and evolutionary nature of its politics. Olson bravely confronts this implication of his idea:

> The contradiction is between the desire for stability and peace and the desire to realize our full economic potential. For those, like this writer, who are so devoted to democratic freedoms and peace that they would retain them at the cost of all further growth, this is a disturbing finding. To some degree, the contradiction is inescapable in that there is no way to avoid it entirely.

The remainder of the book consists of essays by other economists who evaluate Olson's theory and apply it to the experience of England, France, Germany, Italy, and Switzerland. Ironically, the most impressive of these essays is by Moses Abramovitz, who casts serious doubts on some of the central tenets of Olson's thesis. Abramovitz rejects Olson's contention that long eras of political stability necessarily strengthen special-interest organizations and questions the converse assumption that political revolutions, like Roosevelt's New Deal or the fall of Vichy France, inevitably weaken such groups.

Some of the contributors get into regression analysis and questions of "statistical significance" that are rather abstruse. The case studies generally wind down to conclusions that "more research is needed." Two Marxist-oriented essays condemning the whole premise of Olson's essay act as comic relief. One is frustratingly reminded at times of Harry Truman's complaint that if you lined up all the economists end to end, they would still all point in different directions. Still, the attempt is provocative. Olson's essay and a summarizing piece by editor Dennis C. Mueller show that economists can be sensitive to how messy real life is and remain economists. Following in James Madison's footsteps, even 200 years late, is a notable and impressive intellectual accomplishment. □

# Will Without a Way

**George F. Will: *Statecraft as Soulcraft: What Government Does;*** Simon & Schuster; New York.

Like a medical expert who is popular among tobacco lobbyists, a conservative pundit lionized by liberals seems suspect. George Will is such an enigma: the author of a recent cover feature defending the welfare state for *The New Republic*, Will is the Eastern Establishment's favorite conservative, the token Tory invited to fashionable salons and editorial offices. Nonetheless, the trenchant criticism Will levels at liberalism in *Statecraft as Soulcraft* should allay any fears that he has defected to the other side. Like other conservatives, Will blames the amoral egalitarianism of "equal rights grounded in . . . common passions" preached by liberal modernity for "the collapse of standards" in contemporary society. Unfortunately, for all his professed concern for "moral community," Will disdains the company of other conservatives, at least living American ones, adopting a supercilious more-conservative-than-thou tone as

he expounds his "'European' conservatism" drawn largely from Burke. This haughty dismissal of the American right is doubtless one reason for his popularity among liberals. After he informs his liberal readers in the first chapter that "there are almost no conservatives, properly understood," they can only be amused when he announces in the third chapter a "conservative counterattack" aimed at reorienting government: an army consisting of one arrogant general may be entertainment, but it's no serious threat. Even if Will could muster some troops liberals would have little to fear, for his battle plan is so hopelessly vague as to leave wholly clouded in doubt where the columns should be deployed and how they should advance. Thus he upbraids conservatism for its alleged failure "to engage itself with the way we live now," and yet he refuses to dirty ***his*** hands by leaving a "high level of generality" which says little about what is needed in America today.

On the one point that Will is very clear, that the government is the key to American well-being, he again strikes a chord sure to evoke sympathy among liberals, since they dominate that institution and ever seek its enlargement. He justifiably excoriates liberals, though, for failing to apply government to "moral husbandry" or "soulcraft," a task Will believes "politics should share . . . with religion." Surely, government can and should "legislate morality," as Will posits, but it can do so effectively only by reinforcing perceptions already developed by religion. However, Will does not understand religion in America, either past or present. He thus unfairly truncates the thought of the Founding Fathers, largely ignoring their deep and public commitment to God as he indicts them for our present moral crises because they stooped "to the language of 'interest'" in framing the Constitution. Apparently believing that it somehow illuminates our present circumstances



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and confirms his thesis, Will cites Crèvecoeur's view that America cools the religious zeal of European immigrants. Had Will condescended actually to mingle with American conservatives, he would have discovered that Western religious fervor survives *only* in America. Will believes that a "conservative welfare state" could strengthen churches and families, dismissing the antigovernment rhetoric of the right as mere libertarianism. But why is American religion still vibrant while the state churches of Europe (including Burke's Anglicanism) are corpse-cold? Precisely because the Founding Fathers presciently understood that to be strong, religion (like families) must be independent. Hence, rather than joining Will in heaping opprobrium on the Founders, millions of conservatives whom he pretends do not exist recognize that the real destroyers of public virtue are the irreligious utopians of this century who have hellishly perverted our society by rendering to Caesar faith that belongs only to God. (BC) □

## Aesthetics in the Abyss

**Joachim Maass:** ***Kleist;*** Farrar, Straus & Giroux; New York.

"The estimation of the value of art," wrote Leo Tolstoy, ". . . depends on men's perception of the meaning of life, depends on what they consider to be the good and the evil of life. And what is good and what is evil is defined by what are termed religions." In the light of Tolstoy's observation, it is hardly surprising that the favorable reevaluation now in progress of German dramatist, essayist, and short-story writer Heinrich von Kleist should be explicable only in terms of shifting religious attitudes. The importance and magnitude of Kleist's talent has been certified by such eminent German artists as Rilke, Wagner, Brahms, and Mann, but during his own lifetime Kleist received only limited acclaim, Goethe responding to his works with "horror and revulsion." To a large extent, the reason for this neglect was that his imaginative predilections for bizarre eroticism, unsettling doubt, and baffling absurdity were not congenial to the Judeo-Christian heritage still pervasive, though fading, in early 19th-century Germany. And when Kleist simultaneously violated two of the most sacred prohibitions of Christendom by first shooting another man's terminally ill wife (albeit at her request) then killing himself, even his appreciative friend and supporter Adam Müller labeled it "sacrilege."

According to another modern dramatist of stature, William Butler Yeats:

> The intellect of man is forced to choose
> Perfection of the life, or of the work,
> And if it take the second must refuse
> A heavenly mansion, raging in the dark.

Kleist would appear to illustrate Yeats's view perfectly; however, contemporary writers and scholars are determined to canonize both Kleist's work *and* his life. It is tempting to account for this simply by pointing to an apparent lack of something mentioned in Yeats's first line. But more important than mindlessness to the rising reverence for Kleist is faithlessness. Indeed, because the dilemma posed by Yeats presupposes a potently skeptical premise, it must be resolved to the cultural disadvantage of religion. That is, if society is already certain that only those who turn away from heavenly mansions can produce art worthy of being considered "perfect," it cannot long prevent atheism and gloom from displacing faith and hope as the accepted standards against which both art and artists are to be measured. Consequently, the "imperfection" of a despairing and self-destructive life must necessarily metamorphose into saintliness for those whose high culture is exclusively shaped by men "raging in the dark." Hence, Joachim Maass's worshipful biography of Kleist, the first full study of his life to be translated into English.

When explaining his subject, Maass frankly concedes that "at

the bottom of his heart he was a nihilist," that "the destructive drive was strong in him," and that his actions were characterized by "madness" and "a secret sadism," but his adoration for the man seems all the more unrestrained for these very reasons. His eyes must have been wet with tears of devotion when writing about his idol's murder-suicide: "Did ever an artist's action prove the truth of his work more strikingly?" For Maass, "this death had meaning," and Kleist's letters announcing it are "the most splendid ever written by anyone in the face of death." Perhaps such pronouncements will pass for truth among the congregations who meet in fashionable New York salons. But many readers will remember a far more splendid letter written by the Apostle Paul when his "time of departure" was also at hand: he wrote sublimely of a good fight fought, a courageous course finished, a profound faith kept, and of a Galilean whose death was far more pregnant with meaning than his own or than that of a histrionic suicide. (BC) □

## Perceptibles

**Will Morrisey:** ***Reflections on De Gaulle: Political Founding in Modernity;*** University Press of America; Washington, D.C.

Just as a nickel can hide the sun if held close enough to the eye, the exclusive contemplation of France's current 5¢ helmsman can obscure the greatness of many of its past leaders. In his *Reflections on De Gaulle* Will Morrisey enhances our sense of perspective by reminding us that 20th-century France previously followed a far superior statesman. One need not wholly admire de Gaulle's haughty personality nor agree with all of his public actions to perceive his remarkable talents as a politician and his philosophical acuity as a historian and writer. For the nation he deeply loved, he repeatedly wrought miracles. His chief failure, as Mr. Morrisey points out, was his inability to train a new elite who could transcend the inadequacies of purely modern thought as he did and a new citizenry who would follow them. Hence, M. Mitterrand.

* * *

**John W. Whitehead:** ***The Stealing of America;*** Crossway Books; Westchester, IL.

As a committed Christian, John Whitehead is an opponent of the Devil. As he makes clear in *The Stealing of America,* he is deeply



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and justifiably distressed by the way amoral individuals and a secular state have prospered Satan's cause by publicly denigrating religion, the family, and even life itself. Also disturbed by the passivity of millions of professing Christians who have done so little in opposition, he forcefully urges believers to continue and intensify their overdue counterattack. Unfortunately, in trying to depict virtually all secularists as protonazi totalitarians, he indulges in overly simplistic, choppy, and sometimes inconsistent reasoning. To suppose that the suave Prince of Darkness knows only one way to turn a modern nation away from God is to underestimate the Father of Lies.

* * *

**Andrew Oldenquist:** ***Normative Behavior;*** University Press of America; Washington, D.C.

Andrew Oldenquist writes, "moral beliefs are dispositions to be for or against something and not truths in any exciting sense of 'truth.' " By ruling out excitement from the start, as he does, it might seem that his examination of how and why men do and should have moral beliefs would be dull. Nothing is further from the truth. Although it would be a subterfuge to say that it's exciting, it is aboveboard to maintain that it is interesting.

* * *

**Richard Grenier:** ***The Gandhi Nobody Knows;*** Thomas Nelson; Nashville, TN.

Last summer, Air-India ran an ad with the following headline:

> The work of a single man can be more magnificent than the Taj Mahal. Our World of Gandhi Tour gives you both.

There is an illustration of Ben Kingsley—or is that the Mahatma? Had the ad agency copywriters read *The Gandhi Nobody Knows,* they would have more likely mounted a Tour of the Untouchables campaign. □

WASTE OF MONEY

# The Exercise in Triviality

**Michael W. Hughey:** ***Civil Religion and Moral Order: Theoretical and Historical Dimensions;*** Greenwood Press; Westport, CT.

**by J. Jackson Barlow**

Mr. Hughey's title indicates that he intends to examine the complex of beliefs and principles by which a nation becomes a nation. Unfortunately, he offers nothing to improve our understanding of this important theme. Part of the problem is that Hughey does not wish to rock the boat of sociological respectability and so he is unable to point out the shortcomings of the sociological approach to the study of civil religion. For sociology as Hughey practices it trivializes the problem of morality and in doing so fails to understand it.

There are two main traditions in the sociology of religion, and Hughey uses one to criticize and modify the other. The first, originated by Émile Durkheim and applied to American society by Lloyd Warner, Talcott Parsons, and Robert Bellah, holds that a society's beliefs are shared by everyone. The opposing tradition stems from Max Weber; it asserts that certain groups or classes are "carriers" of society's values. Hughey proposes a modest goal: he concerns himself "with the limits of the conclusions reached,

and not their falsity." He thus disclaims—without, I think, realizing it—any attempt to improve our understanding of American civil religion. Hughey assumes that the limits of sociology can best be seen from within the sociological horizon, an assumption which is problematic. At best, Hughey straddles the fence between the two sociological approaches, and the result is that he says nothing either new or useful.

The problem is less Hughey's than sociology's. From its inception sociology claimed that the only way to understand society was through the application of methods adapted from the natural sciences. This implied that a participant in society could not understand it; society could be understood only by a detached observer. The observer, then, had to be indifferent to the things the members of society thought important; "wrong" became merely "taboo," for example. The things which members of society advanced as reasons for action were regarded by the observer as rationalizations or myths. Only the observer could understand the true reasons. In time it was realized that this indifference did not often advance understanding, and that one did have to take the participants' views seriously. Robert Bellah, for example, sees the importance of the theological question in the study of civil religion. But although Hughey has a chapter on Bellah, he does not include any theological component in his treatment of civil religion, nor does he justify this silent rejection. The explanation is to be found in the works of Durkheim and Weber, the founders of sociology.

By treating the principles and beliefs of civil religion as nothing more than rationalizations and myths, Hughey's sociology becomes a trivial academic exercise. Yet his language betrays his conviction that his horizon is superior. For Hughey, American "values and symbols":

> represent various lay and intellectual expressions of the civic ideology of a once-dominant old middle-class stratum at various stages of its decline.

Put in these terms, civil religion is scarcely a problem at all, and the decline of the old beliefs is certainly no incentive for action or understanding. Some sociologists, such as Bellah and Edward Shils, have tried to think through the crisis caused by the decay of "civil religion" in search of an answer to the question: What now? This question requires the orientation of a citizen or a participant in society, not that of a detached observer. Thus it is the first step toward recovering the perspective from which a genuine understanding of society might begin. Though perhaps not very respectable to sociologists like Mr. Hughey, this path is the route to maturity in sociology. Hughey's path leads not to maturity but to senescence. □

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# Life Out of the Fast Lane

***Tender Mercies;* Directed by Bruce Beresford; Written by Horton Foote; Universal.**

During one scene in *Tender Mercies* a prostrate mother cries out in grief that she had given her daughter anything and everything that the girl had wanted. The 18-year-old girl is in another room, in a closed casket. She ran away from her wealthy country-singer mother, ran away to marry a three-time loser. The mother cannot understand what happened, nor why it happened. Part of the answer is evident to the viewer: the girl was spoiled; the mother lavished *things* upon her. Certainly the mother loved the girl, but she thought that *things* could make the girl not need anything, any*body*. But when you are on the inside, that is hard to see.

Hollywood is in sick shape. It is becoming increasingly ill. Anyone who watches movies from the 30's and 40's on the late show can discern the illness. But those in Hollywood, those on the inside, are blithe to the condition. A major cause of the disease is an emphasis on *things*. This is painfully evident in a full-page ad that recently appeared in the trade journal *Advertising Age*. Part of the copy reads as follows:

> Associated Film Promotions not only placed the Wheaties in *Rocky III* and *Poltergeist*, we also placed the Budweiser in *Tootsie!* We placed the Milk Duds and Zagnut Bars in *48 Hours*, and we placed products in *E.T.* In fact, 7 of Hollywood's top 10 grossing films of 1982 contained our client's products. And so did 149 other films as well!

Props have become stars. Actresses and actors have become props. The plots have become insignificant frames upon which to hang these baubles. Part of the sickness of Hollywood—and of contemporary American culture, or at least of its upper stratum—is a state of mind that perceives material goods as the be-all and end-all of existence. Characters in most recent films don't live to do anything but consume—food, people, it doesn't matter. Directors and screenwriters, of course, toss in some demi-weltschmerz that usually takes the form of condemning what exists while simultaneously working to support the vapid status quo. Rare is the film that shows ordinary people, people who have faith that life means more than fast cars, one-night stands, and Zagnut bars. But perhaps ordinary should now be defined as *extraordinary*.

*Tender Mercies* is an anomaly. There are very few *things* in the movie. It is sparse, frugal. It does more with less, more with individual people, less with monolithic objects. Set in central Texas —where the flat, scrubby landscape seems to stretch far beyond the horizon —the film tells of unassuming individuals who live their days knowing, feeling, that they have a purpose, that their lives have meaning, even if they simply write country music or sing in the Baptist Church choir on Sundays or go to school and wonder why the other kids have so many questions about the father who died in Vietnam. Director Bruce Beresford, who did a similarly outstanding job of creating both types and individuals in *'Breaker' Morant*, escaped the Scylla and Charybdis of making *Tender Mercies* poky or maudlin. After all, those of the New York-Los Angeles Axis would wonder, isn't a life without *things* rather pathetic? One day, of course, they will learn about the textures and contours of life. Then it will be too late. And *things* offer no succor. (SM) □

# Elementary, My Dear Viewer

***Krull;* Directed by Peter Yates; Screenplay by Stanford Sherman; Columbia Pictures.**

*Krull* has everything, yet the whole is less than the sum of its parts. It is directed by Peter Yates, who also made, among other things, *Bullitt* and *Breaking Away*. The former testifies to his ability to shoot a kinetic movie; the latter shows that Yates can tell a story. The lead in *Krull* is played by a young actor who seems personable, just as he did as young Marco Polo in last year's TV miniepic of that name. The second lead is played by a man who had what amounts to the second lead in the Royal Shakespeare Company's production of *Nicholas Nickleby*. The love interest is filled by a young woman who should change the pecking order on fashion-magazine covers. The camera work, special effects, and scenery are all well executed and/or well chosen. The story line is tried and true: another variation on Sir Thomas Malory. Yet the movie just doesn't have any affective potency. Why this is so is hard to pin down.

One point that can be raised is that this is just another *Star Wars* spin-off. While this is true, it doesn't clear things up: after all, *The Return of the Jedi* is a *Star Wars* spin-off, and it works. The problem seems to have roots in the fact that *Krull* is a well-constructed movie. Yates was obviously aware of the level of technical execution required of anyone making a movie in the science-fiction-cum-Western genre who doesn't want to come off as a grade-B hack, so he carefully put this one together, with virtually no ragged edges. In effect, *Krull* is like a Holiday Inn. Sometimes the really outstanding hostelries are fine because there is a peculiarity about them: they aren't always convenient and appointed with the most psychologically satisfying colors and furniture for the average person. Proper elements aren't everything; they can be combined to sum less than nothing. (SM) □



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# Damsel in Distress

**Karen M. Stoddard: *Saints and Shrews: Women and Aging in American Popular Film;* Greenwood Press; Westport, CT.**

The Romanian tourist board often runs an ad in the travel sections of upscale publications touting its country as a place to visit if for no other reason than to see firsthand the land of Count Dracula, to experience Transylvania. For many Americans, thanks to Bela Lugosi, Romania is equated with Transylvania, which in turn signifies the famed undead bloodsucker. The count is typically portrayed in films as a suave but totally despicable character. The townspeople who live below the eerie castle that's always subject to a thunderstorm are invariably boorish rubes. While it might seem that Romanians might take great umbrage at the characterizations, there's the ad. And while there have been a number of protests against the portrayals of Indians in cowboy movies and the natives in Tarzan flicks, nary a peep has been heard from anything like D.R.A.C.—Disgruntled Romanians Against the Count. The probable reason for this is that Romanians who might be insulted have yet to identify themselves as a group. And in the late 20th century, the group's the thing.

One group that has closed ranks with a certain vigor during recent years consists, primarily, of women. Many of these women take exception to their treatment in all realms: social, cultural, biological. One who isn't pleased with Hollywood's handling is Karen M. Stoddard. Taking an approach undoubtedly suggested by Simone de Beauvoir, Stoddard examines not simply the roles of women in films, but the roles of *old* women. She, with a certain degree of apology, defines *old* as post-50 years of age.

Stoddard correctly notes that films not only reinforce various aspects of social being (in an earlier age it could be said that they reinforce norms), but that they help shape them. Further, Stoddard

points out that there are certain limitations inherent in the filmmaking process, particularly with regard to character development. Thus, directors must rely on what she terms "visual shorthand," which is essentially an approach that has been used throughout the history of drama: the utilization of masks—character types. The audience is given a sign that evokes a full image of what said character is meant to represent. A little old lady appearing on the screen with a freshly baked apple pie usually signifies somebody's aunt; an underfed old woman with unconditioned hair and a blemish on her nose stands for a witch. Stoddard, who looked at films from the 30's through the 80's and who read the appropriate feminist literature, draws an unremarkable conclusion, one that needs no statement as it can be inferred from a comment that appears in the final chapter of *Saints and Shrews:*

> The problem today is the same as it has been for the entire life of the movie industry; men control the creative, financial and distributive aspects of popular culture entertainment, and thus they give voice to their stories, as well as women's stories, from male perspectives.

The angles—camera and otherwise—are inevitably wrong.

While Stoddard's evidence is impressive (she did her homework), a key factor is overlooked here, as in other similar texts. If any single group is excerpted from that mass that makes up humankind, and if the cinematic representations of that group are analyzed, then one can "prove" that that group has been ill-treated. Not only are there the beforementioned Romanians, but also Italians, Japanese, Germans, Poles, Mexicans... fat, short, skinny, bald, and hunchbacked people... scientists, lawyers, airline personnel.... Pick a group, any group. A case has even been made that WASP males are abused, one based on the well-known fact that there has always been a preponderant number of Jews in high-level positions in the film industry. And Jews, of course, have not fared well: think only of Neil Diamond in *The Jazz Singer* remake. As this is the age of groups, we can now await a monograph detailing how aliens were unfairly portrayed by Hollywood until Steven Spielberg came to town. (SM) □

## In the Mail

***Institutions for Projecting American Values Abroad, Volume III* edited by Kenneth W. Thompson; University Press of America; Washington, DC.** Not precisely what the title implies. For example, Mary E. Cunningham writes: "By consistently focusing on the biologically female side of a woman's success, by sensationalizing events, the media does more than hurt the individuals involved." C'mon, Mary.

***The Virginia Papers on the Presidency, Volume XI* edited by Kenneth W. Thompson; University Press of America/The White Burkett Miller Center; Washington, DC.** National defense, the economy, civil rights, and the presidency: a forum.



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# Cries of Cacophony

**John Cage: *For the Birds;* Marion Boyars; Boston.**

**by Robert R. Reilly**

"I have nothing to say," John Cage comments in his latest book. He goes on at great length to convince his interlocutor, Daniel Charles, that this is so in the series of 10 interviews that comprise *For the Birds.* Ideas have artistic consequences; thus, it is most interesting to discover what ideas have animated this man to inflict upon his fellows such a great deal of noise. What sort of music does a man who has "nothing to say" compose? This is not simply an idle speculation, for there is more than sophistical fun being had here; Cage is serious in insisting upon the world as he sees it, and the type of "music" which he thinks should emanate from it. Why, though, should anyone care? Cage is interesting principally because he has been acclaimed as "one of the most influential composers of our time" by the *New York Times* (March 3, 1983). He is worth examining, then, for whatever insights might be afforded into the sort of society that could accept him as such a cultural beacon.

Cage acknowledges three principal gurus: Eric Satie, Henry David Thoreau, and Buckminster Fuller. This eclectic brew is heavily flavored by the *I-ching* and other oriental spices. When consumed, it induces a horizontal mysticism that removes one from the level of objects, the rational, the normative, the structured—that is, from meaning. This is why Cage claims to have nothing to say. The problem, of course, for someone who thinks there is no meaning is that the rest of us "impose" meaning on otherwise innocent processes. This objectifies, and thus falsifies, them. There is a natural lack of structure in experience, according to Cage, and it should remain unviolated by organization of any kind.

It is easy to see Heidegger's influence here. But the major influence on Cage seems to be from Rousseau, though he goes unmentioned. With Rousseau, Cage shares a belief in a nonteleological nature; indeed, he espouses a teleophobia. Man's end is his beginning; there is no "ought," no moral imperatives. There is no purpose in man or nature; existence is therefore bereft of any rational principle. Cage says: "I strive toward the nonmental." Predictably, he desires "a society where you can do anything at all," i.e., anarchy. He warns us "to be as careful as possible not to form any ideas about what each person should or should not do." He is "committed to letting anything happen, to making everything that happens acceptable." The similarities with Rousseau are often uncanny. Rousseau, realizing that a return to the ideal isolation of the state of nature is impossible, sought to construct a community of atoms in which one could be as separate as possible from the community. Cage notes about Stony Point, the experimental artistic community in which he lived, that "all the couples who come to the community and stay there end up separating. In reality, our community is a community for separation." A community for separation is an excellent description of the kind of society Rousseau wished to construct.

Unlike Nietzsche, Cage sees no need to rescue man from the irrelevance that ensues in a meaningless world; rather, he wishes to rescue the irrelevant, which is part of "opening up to the absence of will." "When I compose, I don't try to interrupt that irrelevance, that freedom from being controlled.... I write by using chance operations to liberate my music from every kind of like and dislike." The primacy of chance undermines meaning by emphasizing the random and by obliterating standards. These standards are not simply those of music; Cage's disorder is far more comprehensive.

The political consequences of this perspective take the shape of an unorthodox Marxism in which "any government in whatever form is to be rejected" so that, through the universalization of technology, "we should reach a stage where machines free us from work." Cage even pays naive homage to Mao: "The Maoist model managed to free a quarter of humanity: that gives cause for thought. Today, without hesitation, I would say, for the moment, Maoism is our greatest reason for optimism." Cage's path to utopia is paved not by physical violence but by aural violence. The problem with the world, it would seem, is that music is organized but the utilities are not. The agenda is clear: extend the grid system of ConEdison to cover the world, let the utilities be universalized, and we will eliminate the want of basic necessities. The only thing constraining the utilities from doing so now is politics. Therefore, "the problem is to put an end to politics," which means, of course, putting an end to the problem of justice. At least he is clear about his goals. Cage thinks the answers lie in technology: "We must let technology act, let it be." Unfettered, autonomous technology will end the oppression of work: anarchy through technology.

In elevating himself above politics, Cage must surely see, even enjoy, the irony that the "apolitical" is the most political of all, that to call for an "end" to politics politicizes everything, including music. He realizes: "my work has stopped being purely musical. I mix musical needs with social needs"; he also understands that noise can be used to destroy power: "I want to destroy it [power]. When I really began making music, I mean, composing 'seriously,' it was to involve myself in noise, because noises escape power, that is, the laws of counterpoint and harmony." This significance of noise as a political dissolvent enhances Cage's appreciation of rock music: "In rock, the traditions are drowned in sound. Every-

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thing becomes confused—it's wonderful!" Noise, however, is not the dissolvent just of power, but also of order. Max Picard theorized compellingly in *Hitler in Ourselves* that Hitler was elevated to power mostly because his was the loudest screech in an age submersed in the irrelevance of noise. Hitler used noise as a path to power.

It is telling that Cage denies the existence of the antidote to noise: silence. One of the central experiences in Cage's life was his immersion in an anechoic chamber where he realized such a thing as silence literally does not exist: he still could hear the blood drumming in his ears. But the crude physiological silence he sought is not the silence of spiritual meditation. One hears blood pounding in one's ears when one strains to capture aurally a vacuum. But nature abhors a vacuum. Silence is not empty, it is full, gestational. Its fullness gives forth to sound. As Picard said, "In the sound itself, there is a readiness to be ordered by the spirit and this is seen at its most sublime in music." Music is felt most keenly when it rises out of silence. The concentrated silence of a concert audience before a conductor lifts his baton is not just social convention, it is a sympathetic anticipation. Cage agrees that silence is "the world of sounds," but he denies that this world has any disposition to be ordered by the spirit. So he sees tonality as a "waste," claims that "everything dissonant I hear as consonant . . . . I have not yet heard a sound that was really unbearable."

I conclude with Virgil Thomson that "Cage's aim with music, like Samson's in the pagan temple, has long been clearly destructive." There is certainly a poetic neatness to the fact that such mental disorder results in such aural disorder. That is a symmetry one can enjoy, however, only if one has kept the capacity to distinguish between noise and music, a capacity lost by those who have elevated Cage to the status of cultural guru. They are mesmerized, I suppose, by the yawning nothingness to which his noise leads them, or perhaps they are entranced by his exotic brand of nihilism. His is the music of the last man, a fitting requiem for any society that accepts the ideas from which his cacophony emerges.

It may be unfashionable to change from the *I-ching* to the New Testament, but one refreshing line of clarity from St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians provides the needed antidote to the gobbledygook of *For the Birds*. St. Paul spoke of the disadvantage of speaking in tongues, using the analogy of music: "And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped? . . . I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue." □

## ART

# Liars & Magicians

**John A. Kouwenhoven: *Half a Truth Is Better Than None: Some Unsystematic Conjectures about Art, Disorder, and American Experience;* University of Chicago Press; Chicago.**

***The Forger's Art: Forgery & the Philosophy of Art;* Edited by Denis Dutton; University of California Press; Berkeley.**

**by Stephen Macaulay**

Half a truth is better than none. So proclaims John A. Kouwenhoven, presumably to contradict or to at least call into question Ben Franklin's "Half the Truth is often a great Lie" (*Poor Richard's Almanack,* July 1758). Kouwenhoven writes about representations: photographs and mechanical designs, for the most part. Photographs, of course, aren't the things that they represent. A photograph is an abstraction: salient characteristics of the object(s) are captured by the photographic equipment. An actual machine—a railroad train engine, for example—is an abstraction of what the original designer put down with pencil and ink on paper. Admittedly, these half-truths *are* better than none; assuming that no misrepresentation is involved (i.e., someone doesn't pass off his work as that of another), these half-truths probably aren't lies. Kouwenhoven is a proponent of things like photographs and mechanical designs. The latter he terms an example of "vernacular design," which has been a topic of his for over four decades. "The arts" as most know them from publications and museums are, to Kouwenhoven, merely a category that indicates a pernicious bias, a hangover from the western European tradition. He says that Americans should look to the artifacts around them, which represent "an art resulting from the efforts of ordinary people to make satisfying patterns and designs out of the novel elements introduced into their environment by democracy and the machine." "Art" becomes watered down through this approach; too many things—from family snapshots to door frames—can qualify. The more the merrier, it seems. Interestingly, there is one area about which Kouwenhoven would say "Half the Truth is often a great Lie": literary translation. He'll take them or leave them—and more often the latter. While he doesn't admit it to be the case, it is probably because he is the sort of person who unthinkingly affixes a "Buy American" bumper sticker on his Dodge Colt. "Mind your own business" is the implied admonition.

The immediate question that looms about translation is this: Is a translated copy something different from the original? From a purely rational perspective, the answer can only be *yes*. Flaubert, for example, wrote in French, not English; therefore, a Penguin edition of *Madame*



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*Bovary* isn't Flaubert's version. Examples of this are legion: any translation shares the same characteristic. However, an equally rational challenge can be mounted against those who, say, like their Herodotus straight: Who in the late 20th century knows the same language that Herodotus spoke in 455 B.C.? Or, for that matter, which person fluent in French—even one who has never left Rouen—knows the same French that Flaubert did? Only a time machine would permit someone to have the most clear understanding of a text since the passenger could perceive the book's place in time, but even then the time traveler would not have complete understanding as he would be nothing more than a tourist. Environmental conditions change continuously—even books written by American authors of the last century require footnotes for intelligibility. Moreover, the perceptions of today are modified by new learning. It was easier to wax eloquent about the moon on the day before Neil Armstrong stepped on it than it will ever be again. Part of this entire situation is succinctly captured by Borges in "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*." In the story, Menard writes, word for word, "the ninth and thirty-eighth chapters of the first part of *Don Quixote* and a fragment of chapter twenty-two" during the early part of this century. The narrator's response to Menard's work as compared with Cervantes's is of interest here. He comments, for example, "Menard's fragmentary *Quixote* is more subtle than Cervantes'. The latter, in a clumsy fashion, opposes to the fictions of chivalry the tawdry provincial reality of his country; Menard selects as his 'reality' the land of Carmen during the century of Lepanto and Lope de Vega." Menard uses an "archaic style"; Cervantes "handles with ease the current Spanish of his time." Borges (through a translator, James E. Irvy) seems to indicate that while the texts, the words, of Menard and Cervantes are the *same*, they are different because time has changed them—or at least our attitude toward and interpretation of them.

What the rationalist approach doesn't recognize is something that can be called, for the sake of simplicity, *magic*. This quality is inherent in great works of art—it is missing in railroad trains and family photos of Disney World. Magic permits certain works to transcend the puny limits erected by men following the original creator. Regularly, "new, improved" translations of ancient works emerge; it is almost as if the texts are laundry detergent. If the latest version is better, then the previous one is inferior, and so on back to the start. But somehow the original, all bastardized renditions notwithstanding, has a spark that makes men want to know whatever they can about it. This does not mean that it drives all readers to learn French or Greek; it does mean that the strength of the work, its magic, transcends clumsy phrasing or whatever damage is done to the original.

This magic that I am talking about is not something that simply bowls a person over. It can be likened to the magic of a magic carpet. Given the proper knowledge, the carpet can be made to fly. Otherwise, it's a floor covering. Similarly, one must have an understanding of what is being presented, a contextual framework. For example, a person who has read Harlequin romances on an exclusive basis might find something by Harold Robbins revelatory and *Madame Bovary* dull ("All talk and disguised action"). That person is employing a context that doesn't support Flaubert's magic.

Paintings can also have this magic; great ones do. Achieving the proper context for understanding paintings is a difficult thing for common viewers—and, as *The Forger's Art* shows in a forceful manner, for learned ones. Part of the problem is the limited nature of paintings: there is only one *Mona Lisa*; there are countless copies of *Madame Bovary*. That's obvious. There is a more subtle difference. An intelligent reader can compare Flaubert and Harold Robbins: both are available in large bookstores and libraries. Paintings aren't so readily compared. This is not because I discount reproductions—Malraux's case for them makes sense—but because the paintings one tends to see in books or in museums are inevitably good or great, all of them tend to have a certain amount of the quality called magic. The person examining the book of reproductions or seeing the real thing will have trouble realizing what *is* because he won't witness what *isn't*. With regard to art museums, for example, only one I've visited makes a strong impression of magic because of its lack of it. The museum, which was created to be a serious, bona fide establishment, is the Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, Florida. It contains, among other things, a large number of works from "the school of..." various masters. It's not that these paintings are poorly executed, for many are very workmanlike in their approach; a 17th-century Italian Kouwenhoven would have high blood pressure from the ecstasy he'd experience. But they lack that essential *something* that, admittedly, cannot be rationally defined.

One justification—perhaps the only one—for critics is that they provide the proper contexts for understanding. At least this used to be their function: now that norms are being discarded in all social discourse, normative criticism is being consigned to the realm of curios. But let's ignore the new breed. What happens when a critic is confronted with a forgery? He can reject it or accept it. Suppose he accepts it, only to find out that it is a forgery. Then there are problems: does the forgery have any aesthetic value? This question was raised by the work of Han van Meegeren, who, during the 1930's, painted works which were passed off as being painted by Johannes Vermeer, a 17th-century Dutch painter. Several noted critics went the full distance, even claiming that the van Meegeren work was unparalleled Vermeer. The forgeries were not discovered through any inherent flaws. But once they were seen as the work of van Meegeren and not of Vermeer (although it must be pointed out that not all could *see* this; scientific analysis had to be performed),



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their artistic—to say nothing of their economic—value came into question. Most of the contributors to *The Forger's Art* examine this case and try to answer the question. There is no agreement.

One of the most interesting essays is "Forgery and the Anthropology of Art" by Leonard B. Meyer. Meyer considers forgeries within the context of culture. This makes sense for the simple reason that art does not exist in an empty field. What is accepted as "art" gains that status because of traditional norms (which, as previously mentioned, Kouwenhoven finds, in the case of the U.S., too limited). In Western culture, the artist is a special, rare individual. Try as one may, he will never pin down *exactly* what it is that gives the artist that cachet. Here, as in Meyer's test, the word *magic* is used for this ineffable quality. As stated, this magic isn't some sort of blinding light; one must learn to discern it: a child might think Chartres is merely an old building; as a man, he might be moved beyond words. A forged painting, after it is discovered to be such, is still a painting. But is it still a work of art? I think not. As Meyer puts it, "Once a work is known to be a forgery, that magic is gone." Learning has taken place; a change has been effected. As long as knowledge counts, as long as norms exist, forgeries will lack magic. That assertion implies, of course, that there are some things that certain people know that others don't know. As long as that is the case (and time seems to be running out) the vernacular is, at best, half art. □

## CORRESPONDENCE

# Letter from Mexico:
## Our Sick, 'Socialist' Neighbor

**by Mary Ball**

What really ails Mexico? This potentially strong and prosperous country is now the world's heaviest debtor. Mexico is the fourth largest nation in the Americas, possessor of perhaps the richest oil deposits in the world as well as of vast stores of iron, uranium, gold, silver, copper, sulfur, lead, and zinc. There are over 10,000 kilometers of coastline washed with warm waters alive with edible fish and seafood, and Mexico's variety of climates permits the growth of every type of grain, fruit, vegetable, and wood. This is a country with a young, active, work-willing population averaging only 35 persons per square kilometer. So how has the present chaotic situation come about? How can it be that Mexico's enormous oil revenue suffices only to service the foreign debt, and that 10.5 million tons of basic foodstuffs have to be imported in a single year? What is the reason for the ongoing collapse of agriculture that has forced millions to crowd into the misery belts of the large cities and for an industrial downturn that sends more millions to look for work abroad?

Plausible answers to these baffling questions are offered by veteran Mexican journalist Salvador Borrego in his latest book, *Metas Politicas*, or "Political Goals." The title might well have been simply *La Meta*, "The Goal" which the author sees as nearing fulfillment, namely, the complete socialization of his country. What Mexican politicians refer to in speech after speech as "our Revolution" contains, Borrego claims, the essence of revolution in the Marxist-Leninist sense. Since its first outbreak in 1910, this movement has made steady progress, attacking the social order through a series of disorienting controls and programmed disasters aimed at depriving the people of basic freedoms while increasing the power of the state. Seen in this light, the present tragic state of affairs is not an accident but a logical, anticipated consequence.

Borrego resists the notion that the present crisis is simply a financial one. He maintains that its root causes are of a political, social, and even spiritual nature. Citing the fact that control of mind and soul is fundamental to all revolutions, he notes that God was banished from elementary classrooms in this eminently Catholic country the same year that the Bolsheviks took over in Russia. Now, every year millions of free schoolbooks are issued that expound an obligatory curriculum wherein man is presented as an evolving animal to be readied for life in a socialist society. No spiritual dimension whatsoever is offered beyond a kind of deified concept of revolution.

State control of private property, another Marxist tenet, has been underway in Mexico since 1910, but it is only in the last two decades that government has moved into the industrial and commercial sector on a large scale. Ten years ago the State exercised direct control over 25 percent of the national wealth, five years ago 50 percent and today—with last year's seizure of the banks—the total has risen to 75 percent. The 25 percent remaining in private hands is largely dependent on government agencies for credits and access to raw materials. Included among the thousand or so enterprises acquired by the state are hotel chains, steel mills, the Renault automobile works, sugar refineries, domestic airlines, movie-theater chains, and cotton and paper mills. It is clear that a great portion of the $85 billion foreign debt was incurred in order to pay for these acquisitions. The revolution's vaunted "transfer of land to the people" through what is known as the *ejido* system has proved to be as dismal a failure as its counterpart in the Soviet Union. Mexico, like Russia, is forced to spend hundreds of millions of dollars a year for food grown in free-enterprise countries.

For the outside observer *Metas Politicas* poses two particularly puzzling

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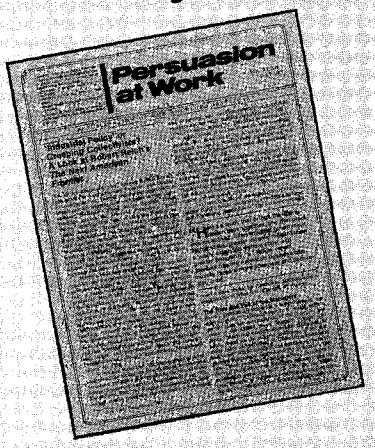


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questions: How has the Mexican State been able to achieve the enormous power it now exercises, and, in a part of the world where the overnight coup d'etat is a recognized political ploy, why has it taken 73 years to do it? Salvador Borrego sees two fundamental reasons why the socialization program has enjoyed such remarkable success: the unwavering determination of political leaders, and the corresponding lack of determination on the part of the public. Successive governments have moved along their chosen path step by step with single-minded dedication. If now and then they seem to have paused or even to have taken a step backward, it appears to have been only for tactical reasons. In general they have followed a systematic, coherent course, continually proclaiming their progress to be inevitable and irreversible. While the present crisis may be more than they bargained for, it, too, can be made to serve their purpose if government becomes stronger while the governed become weaker.

Regarding the second question, about why the "revolutionary" change is so sluggish, it can be argued that Mexico is too large and too complex a nation to be effectively transformed at gunpoint. There are 30 times as many Mexicans as Nicaraguans, and the total area of all six Central American countries would fit into a few states in the south of Mexico. Even Chile and Argentina are, respectively, less than one-sixth and one-third the size of Mexico in population. (This is not to say that a *golpe de estado* is impossible, and an amusing little novel by journalist Manual Sánchez Pontón recounting an imaginary coup and countercoup is currently topping the local best-seller list.) Violence, however, has not been the way of Mexican politicians, at least over the last half-century.

Salvador Borrego comes down hard on the silent majority of his countrymen. When the revolution took away the right of millions of small farmers to own property, other sectors of society shrugged their shoulders: city real estate was not affected, so they didn't care. As the *ejido*

system moved into collectivism, causing millions to flee the countryside, no move was made to stop the process. When the Catholic Church was denigrated, put under impossible controls, and then openly persecuted, popular reaction came slowly; even when thousands had given their lives in armed struggle a compromise put the government back on top. At each stage of the program to insert Marxist-Leninist teaching into the educational system there were sporadic protests, but again, whether through lack of unity among the protesters or the action of infiltrators, the settlements always worked to the advantage of the left. While labor has generally submitted to control by the giant semiofficial trade union, captains of industry, through selfishness and shortsightedness, have missed innumerable opportunities to show what the government's claim to be the only friend of the working man really means. Sector by sector, a free society has been pushed to the wall because nowhere has the relentless process of statization met with firm resistance.

Looking ahead, Salvador Borrego sees the foreign debt with its crushing interest payments increasing. He sees further inflation and devaluation bringing on social unrest, which will be met by government measures stronger than anything envisioned today. He concludes with a question that is really a prayer: Will what the Mexican people have suffered and will suffer in the years ahead forge within them what has been lacking and what they must have in order to defend themselves, something that can only be called a national soul? □

## The American Proscenium

### *A Plague on One House*

The pox, in keeping with the saying, is actually on both houses—Democratic and Republican alike. Yet, the real loser is one house—the all-encompassing one, that of the duly elected representatives of the American nation, that august body so venerated by high school primers on civics. What's happened in that house of late has turned the issue of public education, so intensely discussed these days, into a grotesque symbol of what's wrong with us in general.

On the surface, what we have here is a case of flawless symmetry in the elective democratic system: a Republican and a Democrat, each guilty of sin, impropriety, or hanky-panky—you name it, according to your lifestyle denomination. But in those indefinable layers of individual and collective subconsciousness, the Republican is at least one point up: he made it in the old, regular way, with a 17-year-old formally "willing" female congressional page—if we wish to leave all the circumstantial trappings, pressures, and lures unconsidered. But it was strange to see the gentleman (?) from Massachusetts in the reverent, heavily paneled chamber of the U.S. House admitting *urbi et orbi* that he is a homosexual and shrilly demanding compas-



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sion. *Tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner* was obviously the moral foundation of his nonnegotiable ultimatum, as if what he had done required not absolution but imprimatur. And perhaps he is eschatologically correct: after all, he grounded his factitious righteousness in the reigning zeitgeist. When *Time* magazine puts on its cover one David Bowie —the supreme symbol of plastic, anomic androgyny, a trivial deviate whom *Time* calls "music's most exquisite artifact," the high priest of pop AC/DC formulae —some signals are emitted from the squalid legislatures of mass-produced conscience in mid-Manhattan: worship the cheerful designer-fashioned depravity—that is the *pass partout* to fame cum glory to strive for. Congressman Gerry Studds, the Democratic deviate, when describing his deeds, spoke of "consenting adults," but his "score" was not an adult: he was a 16-year-old boy who admitted to having been awed by the impeccably dressed, worldly "representative of the people" in Washington, D.C. —the mecca of schoolboys who dream about high life in extraordinary places and thus believe that their selection to the Congressional Page Corps is the most superb good luck that can happen to them. The boy was quoted in the *Chicago Tribune* saying of his experience: "he [Studds] provided me with one of the more wonderful experiences of my life, if we exclude the instances of sexual experience, which I was somewhat uncomfortable with"—which proves that he was a homosexual not by his genes, or by his conditioning, but by corruption. So, rather than with consent, we are dealing here with a banal and nefarious case of outright seduction, of preying on youthful corruptibility and vulnerability. Congressman Dan Crane, the macho reveler, if compared to Rep. Studds, comes across as a boorish grabber for whom the honor of representing his district and the resulting power is equated with the primitive principle of living it up. Mr. Studds looks like a perverter of values who must now resort to all the mendacity and speciousness of modern rhetoric.

Yet there's a whiff of the tragic in this sordid, subhistorical anecdote about human sleaziness. It's nested in the reaction of many of Mr. Studds's constituents in coastal Massachusetts. Those fishermen and seamen, rough, hardworking people, when asked by interviewers about their representative's exploits, asserted almost unequivocally that he had always defended their economic interests well, and that it is not their business to inquire as to what he does in his free time. None of the newsmen had the wit to ask whether they would send *their* sons to D.C. as Mr. Studds's pages. It seems that it is someone else's son who doesn't really matter very much.

Mr. Studds will find aid and defense in the enlightened, tolerant, liberal press corps. Already voices are saying that he has the right to the privacy of his instincts. None of those ardent defenders bothers, in this case, to mention the archtenet of yesteryear: if you want a private life, don't run for a public office. They reach the apex of liberal hypocrisy when they invoke Mr. Studds's right to be immune from the people's right to know—in the name of which they are perpetually ready to eviscerate anyone whom they ideologically dislike. □

## JOURNALISM

### Tovarich Gannett

As the omniscient insiders in Washington, D.C. keep repeating these days, the Pentagon is against any U.S. intervention in Central America, chiefly because President Reagan has failed to convince the American people that such a venture is necessary. That's exactly Moscow's dream. Better yet, there are mighty organizations in America which are doing everything they can—wittingly or unwittingly—to help the Politbureau with its awesome task of befuddling the American collective mind to the point of suicidal stupor. Among these is the powerful chain of provincial tabloids, Gannett. In its recent treatment of the issue, Gannett's outlets featured photomontages of idealized portraits of Salvadoran guerrillas juxtaposed with the Vietnam War Memorial—a journalistic tidbit which certainly made the Soviet agitprop establishment ecstatic. Not long ago, one John Hanchette, a Gannett comrade from the chain's news service, provided a piece saturated with delightful disinformation, all of which was dedicated to proving how and why America need not and should not defend itself against the communist encroachment.

His main argument: American pop and rock singers have already begun to perceive the heinousness of our imperialism, and they will bring down any anti-communist efforts, just like they did during the 60's. Hanchette announced with obvious relish that America's most valuable contribution to Comintern, the Marxist crooner Pete Seeger, is already in Nicaragua and ready for action. He then revealed an even more weighty menace:

> There is another political factor present that wasn't there during the Vietnam years. A large swath of Latin American culture is burgeoning in the United States through 'La Nueva Cancion' (The New Songs) which represent a whole new genre of political protest authored by refugees from Chile, Bolivia, Nicaragua, El Salvador and other troubled countries.

A perceptive reader would notice that one Latin American country from which we have quite a lot of refugees (over a million, perhaps, some of whom came in a large batch once called an exodus) is discreetly not mentioned. This tactful silence, of course, implies an untroubled country. In keeping with the correct Soviet propaganda techniques, the absence of those refugees in Gannett's re-



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porting is understandable: they may sing *another* tune, one quite odious to the ears of the Soviet propagandists and their American associates. □

## Old Number in New Dress

A new tabloid is shrilly and obdurately imposing itself upon the American consciousness, vociferously clamoring for attention. It has invaded virtually every shopping center in the country with new dispensing machines, and it emits the same visual and informative noises as many of its genre did before. It's called *USA Today;* it belongs to the Gannett newspaper chain; it calls itself *The Nation's Newspaper;* and its alleged novelty is in its bold claim to cover and reflect the wholeness of this country—a comical attempt by any measurable sociocultural standard. Its calculated disregard for the quality of the news, information, and opinion is in the Gannett tradition that is maintained by the chain's local outlets—a tradition based on the reductive tailoring of journalism to the lowest possible common denominators of the assumed mental level of consumers. Thus, what counts for this kind of daily press are skills of processing, packaging, and merchandizing; that is, making the product salable.

What's most disturbing about this tabloid is its primitive hypocrisy in its presentation of opinion, judgment, and interpretation. There is an effort to pretend some measure of impartiality, nonpartisanship; supposedly *USA Today* is a display window for all ideological and political attitudes. But a closer look at its editorial page demonstrates convincingly that those who *oppose* left-liberal positions are only rare and fleeting tokens, while those who *support* them are printed almost continuously. The op-ed page seems to be farmed out to so-called "guest-columnists," among whom a nonliberal or a nonleftist may be occasionally espied. But some other strange practices may be more indicative of the *real* policies of *USA Today.* One Morgan Strong is frequently featured as a "guest columnist"; he is identified as a "free-lance writer." It seems that Mr. Strong is an unabashed supporter of communist points of view, especially in Nicaragua. Here is what he writes in one of his "guest" appearances:

> The ruling junta and directorate includes priests, radical Marxists and conservative businessmen.

This he has the cheek to assert, in 1983, when even the most pro-Sandinista but serious American newsmen agree that *all* priests in the Nicaraguan government are radical Marxists and that any authentic businessmen, particularly conservatives, in Nicaragua are either in jail, or under house arrest, or have publicly denied that they are either. Mr. Strong then gives his exegesis of what happened in Nicaragua:

> Two years ago, the revolutionary government was rapidly losing popularity. Its confused policies had eroded initial enthusiasm. Opposition was growing and becoming organized.
>
> Then it became known that the United States was sponsoring raids into Nicaragua by remnants of Somoza's brutal National Guard, exiled in Honduras. The CIA generously admitted sponsoring sabotage in the country.

He chooses not to mention that the Carter Administration lavishly supported the Sandinistas before their victory and quite a time after. It took more than three years, and well into the Reagan Administration, before this support ended, after the cold facts of ruthless suppression of any independent forces within the Sandinista revolutionary front could no longer be ignored, after all the "conservative businessmen" and "priests" in positions of power had been correctly identified as former trainees of the KGB reps in Havana. Only *then* did the U.S. respond appropriately, in the form of assisting counterinsurgence from Honduras. As a regular "guest" columnist with transparent sympathies, Mr. Strong does not care for such details. Neither does *USA Today,* apparently. □

## One from Column A, Two from B

It would seem that *The Nation* would find any news of an economic recovery to be cheering, as it would benefit those whom it espouses to support, such as the underfed detailed in its "While Someone Else Is Eating" series. But even *The Nation,* that bastion of compassion for only $1.25 per week, that stalwart defender of select truths, shows that liberal concern goes only so far: until ideology —or self-interest—gets in the way. In a box recently published in its editorial section, the paper stands foursquare against reports and statistics that indicate that the Reagan Administration has aided an economic recovery. It goes on to attack some of its associates: "Most of the press swallows the figures without a chew." Being expert at interpreting menus, *The Nation* selected items that seem to indicate that there is no recovery. After all, it will be a tough day for its editors when everyone can make reservations where they sup. □

## A Match for the Cosmo Girl

Once, magazines designed to appeal only to the libido of their male audience tried to give themselves a patina of respectability by publishing fiction written by well-known authors and interviews with controversial figures. One of these magazines, *Hustler,* has stripped itself completely. In a recent ad that appears in *Advertising Age, Hustler* promotes itself as a medium for advertising by noting:

> The average *Hustler* reader doesn't wear designer jeans. Or play racquetball. Or attend the opera. He doesn't even read a lot.

What kind of man reads *Hustler*? □



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